

4

ウメ種

イラスト・柴乃權人

Kanigoroshinoeiyu and Ermenhilde

神殺しの英雄と  
七つの誓約

エルメンヒルデ

OVERLAP



# Kamigoroshi no Eiyuu to Nanatsu no Seiyaku

(神殺しの英雄と七つの誓約)

Volume 04

Umetane  
(ウメ種)

## Story Description:

Three years ago, to defeat the Demon God who was trying to destroy this world, thirteen braves are summoned from another world. Each of them had varied ages and gender. Each of them was bestowed with cheat like powers not normal in this world.

One asked for indomitable will against any adversity.

One asked for god-like magic power.

One asked for a power to heal everyone.

One asked for a power to cook foods that will bring smile to everyone.

And so forth, each of them conveyed their wish and were granted what they asked for so that they could complete their quest. They then departed, on adventure to defeat the demon god. For two years, they journeyed together and survived many hardships in this world, through joy, sadness, and discord; they persevered and in the end brilliantly defeated the demon god, brought peace to this world and then decided to live there. Among those thirteen, is one man that hid his whereabouts and disappeared after defeating the Demon God, but everyone would say:

It is he, the center of the thirteen braves, who is far more heroic than others.

It is he, who valiantly stands on the foremost line, protecting the others behind him.

It is he, the strongest man that killed the demon god.

And it is he, the only one who is blessed and loved the

most by the goddess.

Original Story can be found here: [Link](#)

## Illustrations





# Character

戻ってきた。彼女と出逢った王都へ。

仲間達と過ごした、平穏な記憶がある場所へ。

戻ってきた。

帰ってきたわけではない。

まだ、旅は終わらない。終わっていない。



【魔剣使い】  
久木真咲

Kamigoroshinoeiyu  
and  
Ermenhilde









「エルメンヒルデ！」

こちらの心臓を狙って  
突き出された大刀の切っ先を、  
翡翠色の長剣で打ち払う。





# 神殺しの英雄と 七つの誓約

Kamigoroshi no Eiyu and Ermenhilde

◆ エルメンヒルデ ◆

## 4

ウメ種

イラスト●柴乃權人























## 【騎士】<sup>ク キ ユ ウ タ</sup> 九季雄太

女神から授かったチート：  
「あらゆる攻撃を防ぐ盾」

*Kuki Yuta*

十三人の英雄の一人。  
卓越した剣技、異世界補正による  
身体能力、絶対防御の盾を持つ。  
周囲の人を立て、自分は裏方や縁  
の下の力持ちで居ようとする。魔神  
討伐後はイムネジア王国の第三騎士  
団副団長を務めている。王女である  
アマルダ姫とは恋仲だが、奥手。



## 【料理人】<sup>ト ウ ド ウ ヒ イ ラ ギ</sup> 藤堂柊

女神から授かったチート：  
「人を救う料理を作れる力」

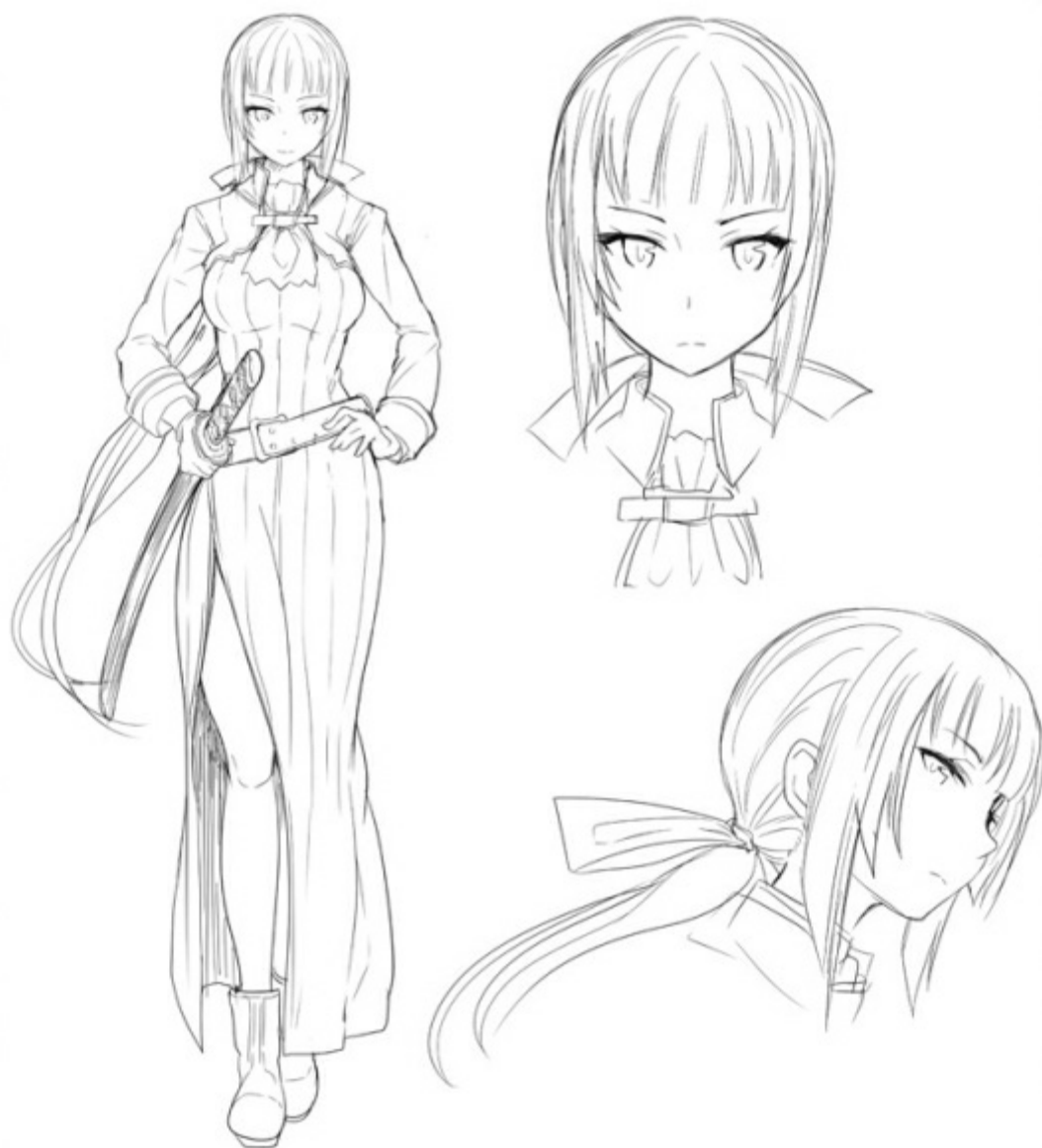
*Toudo Hiragi*

十三人の英雄の一人。ぽっちゃり系の  
青年。自己犠牲の精神が強く、自分  
の料理で仲間が笑みを浮かべる事を  
一番の幸せに感じる。魔神討伐後は  
王都の片隅で料理屋を営んでいる。



# 【魔剣使い】久木真咲

女神から授かったチート：『運命を切り開く力』



*Hisaki Masaki*

十三人の英雄の一人。

女神から五本の刀のような魔剣を与えられた。我流だが剣の腕には自信があり、かつて唯一勝つことのできなかつた宗一に恋心を抱いている。魔神討伐後は戦術都市の学院に通っている。



# Chapter 38: New Life

It was a cold place. A cold, silent, and lonely place. An empty, dark, and sad place.

At its centre, was me. Was I standing or sitting? What's up and what's down? I knew nothing.

Who am I?

I asked. But there was no answer. I couldn't even tell whether I asked that question out loud or did I simply think of it. I was simply there, in solitude.

I want to meet people. Anyone would do. Anything would do. I just want to meet someone. Inside this pitch black darkness, I kept on wishing that.

I want to meet.

.

.

giii with a screeching death cry, the green scaled monster I cut down finally fell. A lizardman. Normally in fantasy games, it's usually a monster race we get to see a lot. A 2m tall body and limbs like that of a human, their body was covered in green scales and they still wore iron or leather armour above it. They also carried either swords or spear-like weapons as well.

Their physical abilities were incredible, possessing speed like that of a beast. Their weapons were dangerous but the

true danger came from their tail attacks. At full strength, it could even smash through a rock.

Cutting down this lizardman, and while breathing out, I put my mithril sword back into its sheath. The sound of battle ended and the sound of the nearby river reached my ears. The well grown trees and the mountain stream brought in a cold breeze. It would be a perfect space for camping if not for the monsters. Even though we're close to the capital, the number of monsters was still large. And, maybe due to the effect of the huge battle that took place here 2 years ago, the monsters here are pretty strong among the ones on the Imnesia continent. Even lizardmen had physical abilities far surpassing their brethren in rural areas. It's the same for other monsters like goblins as well. Even though, normally, monsters don't even come close to places like this where humans gather.

“As usual, your skill is incredible.”

“I felt like I could die any moment though.”(renji)

As I took on the one lizardman in one-on-one combat, Feirona, who was beside me dealt with the surrounding goblins and said that to me. His golden hair swayed in the wind, an incredibly handsome guy. This good looking elf, had the skills to take on 5 goblins without losing a single breath.

And from behind him, a beauty with honey-coloured hair and a silver haired, dog-eared beauty walked nearby. The silver haired girl didn't seem to be bothered by anything and



but the other seemed to droop her shoulders a bit.

“What happened Miss Francesca?”(renji)

“Nothing, it’s just.....”

“By the time Francesca even thinks of using her magic, the battle is already over after all.”

Ah, I see, so she’s worried that she isn’t being of any use. She doesn’t really have to, to be honest. Well, since we’re fighting together as a party after all. I guess she must be feeling inferior seeing that she wasn’t able to contribute much to the party.

“The last goblin.”(mururu)

“Hm?”(fran)

“You were able to destroy its balance. It helped me.”(mururu)

“Uu.....Mururu-chan.”(fran)

Feeling moved, Miss Francesca hugged her from behind. Due to the difference in their heights, Mururu’s head was completely buried in Miss Francesca’s chest. Well, it doesn’t look as lewd as it sounds though. Anyway, it does make it difficult for a guy like me to look at them directly though. Mururu, still had her uncaring face on her face as well.

Averting my gaze from them, I kneeled down near the lizardman’s corpse. Cutting away the right hand from the wrist as proof of subjugation, I put it inside my bag. At the

same time, I also picked up the single edged sword made from the bone of some animal as well. Since it looks like a rare type of sword, it might sell for quite the sum.

“They seem to be getting along quite more in the week I was away it seems.”(renji)

“Well, they’re both women after all. It was troubling for me, as the single guy, to be alone you know.”(elf)

He said that but I don’t think he was actually troubled much by it. His lips were loosened in a slight smile. Seriously, these guys have really started to get along each other in the past one week. How envious, really.

“I’ll go wash my hands.”(renji)

“Yeah, don’t go off too far though.”(elf)

Why am I being treated like a kid?

I left the area and went to wash my hands at the stream. The clear water was cold and made my finger joints hurt a bit. Frowning a little, I carefully washed away and removed the blood sticking to my hands.

“What happened? Why so quiet today?”(renji)

[No reason.]

As I called to my partner inside my pocket, her voice clearly indicated that she was angry. It’s her usual voice but recently it has always been like this for the past few days. She isn’t saying it out loud but I guess its probably because I’m using



the Mithril sword again.

“Don’t sulk like that, c’mon.”(renji)

[I am not sulking!]

An instant reply came. Due to her somewhat childish voice, I ended up smiling instead. I wonder if it was childish of me to think that such an Ermenhilde was really cute?

Done washing my hands, I stood back up. Today’s spoils were-5 lizardmen, 20 goblins. It’s pretty good but splitting the reward in four, the amount wouldn’t be that great though. How many years would it take to repay my debt to Utano-san at such a pace? My earnings for this whole week have been just 4 gold and 10-something copper coins.

It would have been fine if we were just hunting monsters but renting an inn, meals and repair and maintenance of equipment also costs money.

“Miss Francesca, have you calmed down yet?”(renji)

“Ah, yes. Renji-san, are you fine as well?”(fran)

“It’s already been a week. I’m perfectly fine. Thanks for worrying about me though.”

“No, you don’t have to thank.....”

“.....heavy.”(mururu)

Near the embarrassed Miss Francesca’s chest, Mururu gave a tired voice. By ‘heavy’ did she mean Miss Francesca’s weight or just her chest. Having changed her equipment at

the capital, Miss Francesca did not wear her leather breast plate anymore. Instead she was now dressed more like a magician.

A deep blue coloured robe, and beneath it she wore a blazer of the same colour and a white blouse. At the bottom she wore a long skirt and knee length socks. The attire simply seemed to be made for looking good but contrary to my expectations it actually did have a high magical defence. Well, if it suits her and also provides good defence, nobody can complain I guess.

The only problem, if I were to say, was that now her bountiful chest that had been suppressed by her breastplate before was now fully released. My gaze would automatically end up there at times. Just how incredible are they seriously?

“It’s actually weird how you could recover from those kinds of wounds in just a week, to be honest.”(elf)

“Unlike me, I do know a very skilled Sage after all.”(renji)

After getting the treatment, the only reason I kept on sleeping was due to fatigue. Other than that, I could move around from the very first day.

Gathering the spoils for today, I began to prepare for returning back with Feirona. The sun was still up high but I don’t want to get injured again by pushing myself too much.

“But still, you sure seem more energetic after coming to the capital. Back when we first met, you always seemed to be out of energy.”(elf)



“Things happened. I am, well, in need of some money.”(renji)

To be frank, it's not just 'some' money. Considering 1 copper coin to be hundred yen, I am currently in a debt of around 10,000,000 yen. As you'd expect I haven't told anyone that I am in such a big debt. After all, it would be so uncool. Even I think that people would look at me weirdly.

10 silver coins. If that debt was made solely to make me work harder, I guess I am dancing right in Utano-san's palm. Well, I must be overthinking it.

“We're returning already?”(fran)

“Hm, yeah. Today, Souichi and Yayoi-chan will reach the capital as well after all.”(renji)

“The Brave?”

“Yes, him. Unlike me, he's an actual hero.”

At least, he's not the type to go live in debts. I can't even imagine him living a life like me. Yayoi-chan will probably stop him before he fell into a debt after all. It seemed, Mururu had no interest in it as she simply played around throwing stones in the stream. At least help us with packing back up.

“Today's lunch..”

Maybe because she realized my gaze, she spoke up. Unable to understand what she meant, I followed her gaze towards the stream only to see that she was taking out fishes with

stones. Just how good is her dynamic vision, this wolf!?

Since it'd be a pity to let the fishes she killed flow away with the stream, I took off my boots and folded up my trousers.

“what happened?”(fran)

“Well, I wouldn't want Mururu to go into the water in such a cold weather.”(renji)

Saying that, I entered the river. Due to intense cold of the water, my legs stopped moving the moment I entered the stream.

“Are, are you okay?”(fran)

“Co-o.....It's cold!!”(renji)

“Obviously. It's the [ninth month] already.....after getting injured, do you plan on catching a cold this time?”(elf)

[Seriously.]

While listening to Feirona and Ermenhilde's fed up voices, I quickly gathered the fishes floating on the river. Only Miss Francesca was worried for me. In the meantime, Mururu took down more fishes and she didn't even seem to care about me.

Even though the fishes should have been scurrying around due to me entering the stream, she was still taking them down effortlessly with those dazed eyes of hers. By the time I finished gathering the rest of the fishes, Miss



Francesca and Feirona completed packing up.

“Share some with me as well.”(renji)

“Okay.”(mururu)

[.....haah.]

“I’ll start a fire so hurry up and warm yourself up.”(feirona)

Coming out of the stream, as I tried to wash away the smell of fishes from my hands, Feirona said that to me. It was inevitable. My whole body felt completely cold.

“How caring of you. Comrades I can trust are really the greatest thing one can have.”(renji)

“Don’t say things you don’t mean.”(elf)

“No, I’m actually serious you know.”

Feirona gathered the branches and Miss Francesca lit the fire with her magic. As wiped my legs and turned them and my hands towards the fire, that alone seemed to have warmed me up.

“fuu...”

“The fishes, will you cook?”(mururu)

With a plop, Mururu sat beside me. Soon after, Miss Francesca and Feirona also sat around the fire.

“It’s a bit late but let’s have our lunch, shall we?”(renji)

“Yes!”

Miss Francesca gave a somewhat happy reply. She really

likes outdoor things like these. Sleeping in tents, preparing a campfire, cooking and eating animals and fishes caught fresh from the wild etc. Unlike what her appearance would suggest, she's pretty bold.

Giving a small smile seeing her reaction, Feirona began to prepare to cook the fishes. Peeling off the scales, removing the innards, he skewered the fishes on an impromptu stick. While admiring his skill, I also helped in the preparations. That said, I was only copying what he was doing. The first job of my newly bought iron knife was to cut open a fish.

Having completed the preparations, as the fishes roasted over the flames, I washed my hands in the stream. Just then, I felt a strange gaze on me.

[What happened?]

“No, well.....”

I looked towards the place I felt the gaze coming from but there was no one there. Since we have been hunting in this place for a while now, I know there is nothing in that direction.

Was it a monster?

It's normal to think like that. Since we're 4, it probably ran away maybe. Without thinking too deeply, I returned back towards the bonfire.

“Did anyone sense something just now?”(renji)

“Something?.....”(fran)



“Yeah. I think I felt a strange gaze at me but....”

Saying that, I looked towards Feirona and Mururu. These two are far more sensitive than me in these areas but they shook their heads.

“Must be my imagination then.”(renji)

Ermenhilde didn't sense anything either so that really must be the case.

Deciding to forget about it, I decided to simply stare at the roasting fishes. For some reason, I always feel like I stare at fishes at times like this. It seems it was the same for Miss Francesca and Mururu as well, so there was total silence among the 4 of us. I felt like both Feirona and Ermenhilde gave a sigh but I didn't care about it.

After some time finally, the fishes had been roasted well. There were 6 fishes. Ms Francesca and Feirona took 1 each and me and Mururu took 2 each. Feirona, though his body is of the same size as me, was actually a light eater. It's amazing, to be honest, how he manages that. I feel like I could eat even three of them. Though I probably won't in the end. After all, it's always better to not overeat. As I bit into the fish, since it came from a clear water stream, there was no taste or smell of mud in it. Since we just caught it, it felt really fresh as well. I ate up my first one very fast.

“Hm?”

[Just now, did you sense magical energy as well?]

When I turned back sensing the gaze once again, Ermenhilde seemed to have sensed magical energy as well.

“What happened?”

“I felt that gaze again.”(renji)

I stood up. It would have been fine if it was just a gaze but since Ermenhilde sensed magical energy as well, I need to be cautious. Confirming the Mithril sword hanging on my waist, I closed in towards the river.

The others as well, though they didn't sense anything, seemed to have become on guard. But even after waiting for a while, nothing happened. Was some other magician fighting somewhere a bit far from here? Seems unlikely. Ermenhilde only sensed magical energy once and can't sense it any more. What's going on? I scratched my head.

In my view was the same old clear stream, trees and the cold wind. There was no change. In fact I felt like the strange one.

“Well, I guess it can't be helped.”

I'll just have to deal with it when something happens. Thinking that, I returned near the fire. When I did, Feirona and the others also dropped their guards and went back top focusing on their meal.

“.....Oi, one of my fish is gone.”(renji)

“ngu, mugugu.”

On turning my gaze, the chibi sitting beside me began to chew the fish in her mouth at a vigorous speed. It's bad manners, but that isn't the point. There were three sticks lying in front of her. I called her but she panicked and turned her gaze away.

“Oi Mururu, I won't get angry so look towards me.”(renji)

“nn....you won't get angry?”(mururu)

“Probably.”

When I said that, she averted her face again. This brat.

Miss Francesca and Feirona kept on eating their fish with a wry smile. Well, I did eat one so I guess that's fine. Suddenly I felt the gaze again. I turned again.

[Again?]

“Now this is really getting weird.”

Feirona stood up and began checking his equipment. Miss Francesca quickly finished her meal and took similar actions. Only Mururu, whose weapon was her body itself, remained the same. She's still enjoying the taste of the fishes. During the dinner, I am definitely stealing a part from her food. I thought of such childish things. But still, why do Feirona or Mururu still not sense that. That's what worrying me more.

“I guess there's no choice. Let's cross the river.”

It's so damn cold though. Well, at least the stream isn't deep.



.

.

Walking for sometime after crossing the stream, there was a tall cliff there. Probably 30m high. And above it was nothing, just a vast plain. No flowers or trees, just plain land. After getting summoned to this world, it was there where we first defeated a Demon God's descendant. Maybe due to its effect, that place has become a dead area. And if you were to walk through that land for almost a week, you'd reach the Tactics City.

Well, leaving that aside, there was something I had not seen on this cliff. Even though we had come here a few times before. It was a cave. It's size was approx, enough to let an ogre get in.....a 5m tall cave. I ended up tilting my head in confusion while looking at the entrance.

“Was that here before?”(renji)

“No, it wasn't, it seems.”(fran)

While looking at the map in her hands, Ms Francesca told me that. It's just a simple map but if a cave was this near the capital, it would have been mentioned in the map. That means it's a newly made cave but we had come here only a few days ago as well. Are caves really that easy to make?

Or maybe--

[I can sense magical energy. It's the same as the one before.]

“So this is it. Ermenhilde, can you tell what it is?”

[I can't. It's too weak.....very low level, most probably.]

I lightly tapped Ermenhilde inside my pocket.

[It could be a trap as well. You'll still go?]

“We will?”(mururu)

Hearing Ermenhilde's voice, the other 3 looked straight at me. I am not hiding Ermenhilde's voice from them any longer. It's something like a proof of my trust. Each and everyone of their reactions were fun to see. Right now, since she's sulking, Ermenhilde isn't talking much though. Just how much do you hate seeing me use other swords?

But, right now as expected of the situation, she's not objecting anymore. Hearing Ermenhilde's voice, Mururu asked for my confirmation as well.

“It's majority rule in such cases right?”(renji)

“You're the leader though, Renji.”(elf)

“I said this before as well but when the hell was that decided!?”(renji)

While talking like that, I took out a torch from my bag, wet it with oil and asked Ms Francesca to light it up. It will be dangerous but my curiosity won. I was curious of this gaze only I could sense. And for some reason, even now, I don't feel a sense of danger. If we were to rely on my intuition, we should be fine. I thought that without any meaning.

“Hmm then, let’s go, shall we?”(renji)

“Yes.”

When I said that lightly, Ms Francesca gave her agreement as well. We walked in a line with me at front, then Mururu, Francesca and Feirona at the end. I held the torch and Ms Francesca was using her magic to light the place up as well.

The inside of the cave did not feel uncomfortable and air seemed to pass through well. It might be connected somewhere on the other side. The cave seemed to have been dug very uniformly in the same shape. Normally, a cave is more uneven and rough. Such a well made hole is not something that occurs naturally. It must be dug out through magic.

As I walked on while making theories, Ms Francesca raised a small scream from behind. At the same time, Mururu made a very unwomanly gueeh sound. Both their voices resounded in the cave.

“What happened?”(renji)

“It’s a bug. I’ve killed it though.”

“I see.”

If there’s some trap ahead of us, our voices must have given us away by now. I put my hand on the handle of the Mithril sword. It seems Feirona thought the same as I could sense him becoming a bit more tensed.

We stayed there unmoving for a while but there seemed to



be no change. Relaxing a bit again, I removed my hand from the sword.

“Is there nothing here?”

“There are bugs though.....”(fran)

“That’s irrelevant.”(mururu)

Mururu’s voice felt a bit sullen. Most probably, getting surprised by the bug Ms Francesca must have hugged her neck way too tightly from behind. Her voice felt as if her throat was being tightened.

We continued walking deeper inside. It had been 10 mins already I think when I finally saw a bluish light in front of us.

“Could it be the exit?”(fran)

“Seems to dark for that.”9renji)

[.....There’s something there.]

Hearing Ermenhilde’s voice, everyone drew their weapons. Mururu turned her hands into claws.

[Be careful.]

“I’ll go first. Feirona, I’ll leave you to cover me.”(renji)

“It might be difficult though.”(elf)

“Mururu, follow me with some distance between us.”

“Got it.”

Due to the lack of light, it must be difficult for Feirona to shoot arrows. Then, I’ll take Mururu, who possesses extreme

physical abilities with me towards the bluish light.

If this really is a trap, I should be the perfect target since I am also holding the torch. I said that but I couldn't feel any presence other than me. The cave seemed uninhabited. I was sure of it.

But Ermenhilde said that something was there, then there must be. While being cautious I continued walking when the cave opened up.

“-----”

I lost my breath.

In front of me was a crystal giving off blue light. It was around 5m big. A really big gem-like crystal was, floating in the air. But even that wasn't the problem. Floating crystals were definitely rare, after all this a world of swords and magic. I have seen them a few times before as well but,--

“Someone's sleeping inside?”

Seeing a human sleeping inside a crystal; that was a first even for me. While being cautious of my surroundings I went closer to it. Just as Mururu said, her eyes were closed as if sleeping.

Inside the blue light, a girl, completely naked, was sleeping while hugging her legs. That was the first impression. Since I could feel her life force, I know she isn't dead.

“It's fine, you guys can come as well!”(renji)

As I shouted towards Feirona, I handed the torch over to Mururu.

“Can you tell what she is?”(renji)

[.....]

I asked but got no answer from Ermenhilde.

While feeling mystified, I slowly, timidly put my hand on the crystal. It was warm. It didn't have the coldness of a rock, of an inorganic substance. It felt warm, like the skin of a person. And--

“---!?!”

My eyes suddenly met with the girl inside the crystal.



## Chapter 39: Gathering (1)

With a heavy sound, I lay down the bag filled with today's earnings on top of the table. 5 lizardmen and 24 goblins. Since we sold their equipments as well, our total earnings was 11 gold and 40 copper coins. Dividing this among the 4 of us, my total earnings for today was 2 gold and 85 copper coins. For something we earned in just half a day, it was pretty great.

Normally I'd be super happy at that and in happiness I'd have spent that money to eat a feast.

But right now, I could only breath out a heavy sigh. The problem was the woman in front of me.

The Imnesia continent has a lot of adventurer guilds but we go to the biggest of them all. The reason was simple, the more people that gather, the more information and request can be found. Accordingly, requests were given out on a first come, first served basis and without a certain level of ability, you'd be unable to make any money.

Inside such an adventurer guild, we—or rather, the girl in front of me stood out like a sore thumb. Black hair that were uncommon in this world and ruby red eyes as if they were made of blood. An almost abnormally white skin and an expression devoid of emotions. It's the woman we found sleeping inside that crystal in that cave.

“Oi, you awake?” (renji)

“Yes.”(woman)

She does reply whenever I ask something but I couldn't sense any life in her eyes. She simply looked at me blankly solely because I called out to her. Whether it be her condition right now or the fact that she was inside a crystal, it simply felt too suspicious.

Right now she was wearing ms Francesca's spare clothes along with my old mantle on top. They were thick, dull looking clothes and trousers along with my worn out mantle. Yet somehow, it didn't seem to reduce her beauty in any way. The gazes of the men in guild was a proof to that. Everytime a guy passed by, they'd definitely give her a side glance. Why are they even trying to hide their gazes when it's as clear as day though? Well, this woman didn't seem to care about it at all anyway.

It was really a pain to get from that cave back to the capital. After all, she was totally naked inside the crystal. Even we didn't carry any stuff not necessary for monster hunting. Basically, we didn't have anything to let her wear. But we couldn't let her walk naked either so I lent my mantle and to hunt goblins just for some boots for her to wear. I had Ms Francesca go back to the capital first and prepare some clothes for her. It was really mentally tiring till then.

If someone saw me walking around with a nude woman, even if this world's laws were laxer than Japan, my own comrades would never forgive me. Worst case, I wouldn't get to see the sun rise another day.

[It's as if she's dead.....I can't sense any life from her.]

Seriously. Agreeing with Ermenhilde inside my head, I sat down. Ms Francesca and Feirona's gazes turned towards me but I could only sense fatigue from it. It seems they weren't able to get any info out of this woman. Like Ermenhilde said, her dead-like ruby eyes turned towards me. But I couldn't sense any kind of clear will from her eyes. But as she looked at me straight without averting her gaze at all.....it felt as if she was looking directly inside the deepest portions of my heart.

“For the time being, can you at least tell us your name?” (Renji)

“.....name?” (woman)

“Yes, your name.”

Going by her appearance, she looks about 20 years old. Well, there are beings like elves and vampires as well so appearances can't really be relied on. She was pretty tall, almost the same as Ms Francesca. Even her figure was better than the average woman. She might be losing a bit in chest area but her curves were definitely visible. I can't help it, she was completely nude back in the cave after all. I couldn't not see her even if I wanted to. It's pretty normal as a man to be honest.

“Solnea..”

“Hm?”



Her blank gaze slowly turned away. I followed her gaze but it wasn't focused at anything particular. She was simply looking outside the window into the bust city streets filled with people. There was nothing else.

"I think I was referred to as Solnea."

"You think?"

Both Feirona and Ms Francesca's voices overlapped. And, I as well, shook my head at her way of speaking. It's so weird, as if she's talking about something unrelated to her. Maybe due to the atmosphere she gave off, it felt like, rather than a woman, she was simply an empty vessel shaped in the figure of a woman. I don't think she's hiding anything from us either. It didn't feel like that. She just spoke in such an indifferent manner that it gave off such an impression to me. It felt like seeing a robot that appears in a low budget B-grade movie. I think Ermenhilde is correct in saying that you couldn't sense any life from her.

In the first place, the question arises how did she survive inside that crystal. A woman living inside a crystal that was in a cave that appeared out of nowhere. I took out a crystal fragment from my pocket. The moment she woke up, that crystal shattered into pieces. Into many small pieces, like the one currently in my hand. I couldn't sense any magical energy from it wither. It was simply a pretty looking crystal. According to Ermenhilde, there was very slight magical energy inside it when the woman was still inside the crystal though.

I brought back one of the fragments but I doubt it'd be of any use. And with its small size, it probably wouldn't sell well either.

“Um,mmm, Solnea-san?”(fran)

“What is it, Francesca?”(sol) (T/N: I'm gonna shorten Solnea to 'sol' while tagging the dialogues.)

“.....Eh?”(fran)

“Francesca.”(sol)

Saying it again, Solnea pointed towards Ms Francesca. After that came Feirona and Mururu. At the end, she pointed towards me and spoke my name as well.

“Was I wrong?”(sol)

“No, you weren't but..”

“Somehow, it's putting me off.”(mururu)

“Seriously.”(renji)

On hearing Mururu's words, while knowing that was rude, I ended up agreeing with her anyway. She must have learnt our name while listening to our conversations but what was important was the fact that it made me feel wary of her. She named herself and spoke ours as well. To make us feel wary of her from just that must be thanks to the fact that there was still no change in her expression or atmosphere when she said that.

It made me feel like I was looking at a lull sea. No change

at all. No matter how far you look, there was only calm, unmoving seawater. There were no waves known as emotions. I wonder if the depths of the oceans were also as weird as this woman.

“Renji.”(sol)

“———”

[.....Muu.]

Speaking that, her pale white beautiful finger slowly moved to point towards my pocket under the table. Where Ermenhilde was.

“Something wrong?”

“.....Can you hear it?”(renji)

“No.”

And as expected, she again answered indifferently as usual. I purposefully showed on my face that I seemed to be wary of her but still, there was no wave in her sea of emotions. She simply, silently, kept on looking at me, as if her ruby red eyes were looking at something deep inside me. It was me who averted his gaze first. Somehow, I am really bad with these type of people. Like, I can't converse with them properly, and it felt, like only they knew everything about me.

“.....What exactly, are you?”(renji)

“I do not know.”(sol)

“That again, eh.”

She's been like this from the time she woke up in that cave. Why was she in that cave? Why was she sleeping inside a crystal? What even was she? On asking any of these, I would only get the answer that she didn't know.

Feirona gave tired sigh.

"What am I? who am I? Why did I wake up?....."

Her ruby red eyes looked downwards. There, I felt a slight change in her emotions. Was it anxiety? Or fear?

"I do not know."

She telling the truth. Somehow I felt that.

"Rather than not knowing, maybe you just don't remember it?"(renji)

"I wonder."(sol)

She replied in very soft voice. When she finally looked back up again, she looked at me with her usual cold eyes again.

"I do not know that either."(sol)

".....You don't know if you have just forgotten it all or not?"(fran)

Miss Francesca questioned her. When I looked at Feirona, he was frowning. On realizing that I was looking, he looked at me back with sharp eyes. Implying that he left it to me to decided what we were going to do about this woman. This is why I hate being the party leader. After hearing everyone's opinions, the final decision would, in the end, come to me.



I doubt Feirona wants to get more into this trouble. It was already enough that we helped bring her back from the cave to the capital. That counts as helping her, right? My intuition told me that I shouldn't stick my head deeper into this.

“Do you have no memories at all?”(renji)

“Memories....”(sol)

She reacted a bit on my question. As if thinking of something, she looked away again.

Just then, the guild became a bit more noisy suddenly. Getting curious, when I looked towards the swinging doors.....there was woman standing there who looked familiar.

Light brown, ruffled hair and blue eyes that seemed to lack any kind of motivation. Though shorter than Ms Francesca or Solnea, she was still slightly taller than average. Her body dressed in a black one-piece dress was on the slender side but it didn't mean that she was lacking in womanly features. A white apron was wrapped around her thin waist and she gave off a scary level of charm that could pull any man's eye. She also wore high laced boots as well. Her longish skirt fluttered a bit gived a slight peek at her beautiful legs underneath.

If I recall, she turned 22 or 23 this year.

She seemed to be looking for someone as her frilly hair band swayed around. If she would do her hair properly and have a bit more energetic looking eyes, it would be absolutely

perfect.

Making you feel like that, this maid, that seemed to be lacking something, stood there.

Yes. It was a maid. A maid that totally didn't belong in such a guild.....a maid that seemed to be lacking motivation. My eyes met with this maid, making me panic as I quickly averted my gaze. Only to meet eyes Mururu with equally blank eyes, though not as blank as Solnea.

“An acquaintance?”(mururu)

“Nope.”

Saying that, I lowered my waist in my chair trying to run away. But faster than that, the aforementioned maid was standing right beside our table. I could only sigh seeing my comrades incredible cheats yet again. Even this girl, who wasn't even a combat type, possessed more physical ability than me. I just can't help but sigh at that, can i?

Unable to even react to her movements, both Feirona and Mururu could only look at the maid blankly. Ms Francesca was surprised and Solnea, as expected, remained emotionless and just looked at her.

But the maid, without paying their gazes any mind, looked down at me with a somewhat coldness in her eyes. If it was a guy with a certain specific sexual disposition, he'd be thanking her just for that gaze.

Unfortunately, I did not have such fetishes.

“You’re so heartless. Did you forget about me?”(maid)

“Before that, why are you in maid clothes?”(renji)

This maid woman. Her name was Kudou Rin. Just like me, she was summoned from our world. One of the 13 Heroes, why the hell was she wearing a maid uniform?.....I can’t understand at all. There was the sudden reunion as well; my head was in total confusion.

Realizing my gaze, she gave a slight bow while holding the edges of her skirt. If she had smiled right there, it would have been completely perfect but her expression was as usual unenergetic. The gap was simply too big. Apologise to all the real maids in the world!

“Does it suit me?”(rin)

[fumu, those clothes are cute.]

“Yes, the clothes are cute indeed.”

“.....”

Maybe she herself knew that it didn’t really suit her since she didn’t say anything more. But it did seem like her mood went a bit down though. But the clothes really are nice you know? If she’d put some effort into herself as well, the clothes would suit her more.

While thinking that, I looked around. A maid that came to the guild out of nowhere and bowed to an adventurer..... We’re standing out in all the bad ways. But this girl doesn’t care about any of that. Saying that she simply does things ‘at

her own pace' may sound better but in truth, she simply can't read the mood. She doesn't even care about others. Herself, and her comrades. Only they were her priority. Everything else came afterwards. It's pretty easy to understand personality but I feel that it's pretty extreme. Even right now, only I am visible in her eyes. She isn't even looking at Ms Francesca and the others sitting on the same table. Neither is she aware of the curious gaze from everyone else in the guild right now. In her world, there were only me, her and Ermenhilde right now.

“For the time being, at least take a seat. I'll introduce you to my comrades.”(renji)

“Comrades?”(rin)

Let's start from there. If I didn't introduce Ms Francesca and others myself, she wouldn't even notice them till the very end.

Saying that, I looked towards the others sitting with me at the table at which Kudou also looked at them. Her reaction was basically- 'Oh, someone was here?' Like that.

While looking at them and being urged by me, she sat down on a chair. Seeing such a reaction from her while dressed in maid clothing is just weird. As expected this girl has something missing in her head. And, Ms Francesca and Feirona were too stunned from the impact. Even Mururu seemed to be troubled while deciding how to react. Only Solnea remained the same, emotionless as usual.



“The Elf is Feirona, the beastwoman is Mururu, the magician Ms Francesca. And this is Solnea, who we met just a while ago.”(renji)

“Oh yeah, I heard about them from Yuuko-chan. Yamada-kun’s current party.”(rin)

“And this is Kudou Rin.”

“Nice to meet you Elf-san, Beastwoman-chan, Magician-chan, and black haired girl.”

[You haven’t changed, have you Rin?]

“Humans don’t change that easily you know? I am me. Others are others.”

What kind of naming sense is that. I shook my head. She’s rude as usual. Maybe surprised from Kudou’s reaction, Ms Francesca looked towards me.

“Rin Kudou-sama.....is it?”(fran)

“Don’t know who you’re referring to but yes I’m Kudou Rin, magician-chan.”(rin)

“Uh, eh?!”

With a speed that couldn’t be foreseen going by the lax expression on Kudou’s face, she grabbed Ms Francesca’s hand over the table. Just as Ms francesca raised a voice confused from what’s happening, I stepped on Kudou’s foot beneath the table almost at the same time. Since she’s wearing boots it probably didn’t hurt her much but she let go

of Ms Francesca's hand.

“As usual, you have cute women around you.”(rin)

“I'm not going to ask what you mean by 'as usual' but as usual, you're fast to move as well eh?”(renji)

“But she's a cute girl. I can't help but make a move on her can I?”

“.....don't say that right in front of the person in question.”

“Eh?”

In that momentary gap, this time Kudou tried to grab Mururu's hand who was sitting opposite of her. But as expected of Mururu, she quickly withdrew her hand and beneath the table before Kudou could grab it.

Instead of being surprised, Kudou made a happy expression seeing Mururu's reaction. She's a really bad mannered maid. She should get scolded by her master. But, oh well, she's her own master here after all. That's the kind of personality she has.

“So, what's going on? You didn't come to the guild for no reason have you?”(renji)

“I came to get you, Yamada-kun. Yuuko-chan is calling.”

“Aah, I see.”

Right, Souichi has already reached the castle it seems. Due to Solnea's appearance, I completely forgot about him. I

guess they need to talk about the demon we captured back at Magic city.

There's Solnea's case as well, as well as this demon. My head hurts. All this difficult thinking is making me depressed. I'm pretty sure none of this is going to lead to something fun. If I were to use a term used in our original world, this was clearly a 'flag' for me.

"How did you know I was here, at the guild, by the way?"(renji)

"Ara, there's no way I'll mistake where Yamada-kun is ever, will I?"(rin)

[Muu.]

Saying that, slowly, casually came near me and leaned her body over me. Raising a small voice, Ms Francesca's cheeks turned red. Finding her expression interesting, Kudou began to come even closer only to quickly dodge away as I raised my fist to hit her in the head. As usual, her reaction speed is incredible. Damnit.

"Don't play around. You probably used Ermenhilde's magical energy as a guide, didn't you?"(renji)

"You're no fun...."(rin)

Kudou was extremely sensitive to the flow of magical energy. Especially if it was our, the summoned ones' magical energy, she could sense us even while being far away.

In my case, since I have no magical energy, I have

Ermenhilde. She must have used that to get here.

Holding carious titles like [Metalsmith] [Item Creator], Kudou forges iron, while sensing its magical energy, and turns them into items. According to her, by doing that, she's able to create items of far better quality than those made by anyone else.

I have not much knowledge about item or weapon creation but going by what an acquaintance of mine, who is a craftsman, said, her methods are the same as what dwarves or elves use. That is, the forging techniques of dwarves along with the magic bestowal techniques of Elves. Combined with the creativity of a human from another world. That's what Kudou is. During our journey, I remember her making all sorts of dangerous things like bombs, poison etc etc.

“Then, let's part ways for today, shall we?”(renji)

“Yeah, sure.”(elf)

Feirona agreed to my proposal. If Utano-san is calling me, I can't not go. She rarely calls me for personal reasons after all.

While wishing that this isn't another sort of trouble, I sighed. At the same time, I also want to talk about Solnea as well. The girl who knows nothing except her name and awoke from inside a crystal. No matter how I look at it, it's way too suspicious.

“What is it?”(sol)



“ ..... ”

The moment I looked away for a bit, Kudou's gaze turned towards Solnea but Solnea's reaction was as usual. An emotionless voice. Unreflecting red ruby eyes. I wonder what she thought about her as JKudou quickly lost interest in her.

“I'll go back first.”

Saying just that, she left the guild. I could only feel sympathy for all the men eyeing Kudou from behind as she left. That girl prefers women over men. And the hurdle to become Kudou's ideal partner was too high. For someone who seems to be lacking energy all the time, that girl expects her partner to have way too many qualities. That's the kind of woman she is. She'll have an irritating personality even if one was to date her I think. And if someone still wanted to date her after knowing all that, he/she is either an angel or has a very weird fetish.

But still, that was strange. I looked at Solnea. Even with her expression less face and emotionless eyes, she's still definitely a beauty, anyone would agree. I was confused why Kudou didn't make a move on her. No, that was good in its own way I guess, especially for Solnea.

“Sorry about that. It seems I have stuff to attend to so I'll be leaving first.”(renji)

“No, no need to worry about us.”(fran)

“The reward.”(mururu)

“yeah, let’s split it up quickly.”

Saying that, I split our reward in 4 parts. And I picked one gold coin from my portion and handed it to Solnea.

“Go buy some clothes with that. I’ll come to take back my mantle later.”(renji)

“.....”

[Oi, but your debt.....]

“Don’t worry too much, we can earn as much money as we want later.”

[.....I’m scared for what’s gonna happen.]

Solnea closely inspected the gold coin’s both sides blankly.

“That’s a gold coin. You can buy things with that.”(renji)

“Is that so?”(sol)

[So she doesn’t even know that much.....]

I could only shake my head. Mururu was the same but, do I have to teach another one how money is used? When my gaze turned towards Ms Francesca, she gave a troubled nod.

“Sorry, but if you have time, please look after her.”(renji)

“Yes.”(fran)

Finally, I glanced at Feirona asking him to keep Solnea under surveillance. I don’t really like this, but I can’t just leave her alone like this either can I? Not to mention, this Solnea has way too many mysteries around her.

Giving a wry smile, Feirona gave a nod. To understand my thoughts without even saying anything, he's a really reliable comrade.

"Also, if you're going to rent a room in an inn, tell me where. I'll be worried if you suddenly disappeared."

"I understand."

Finally, I stood up. Though I pretty much have asked Ms Francesca and others to keep her under constant surveillance.

Feirona who understood that, gave a shrug with a troubled expression. Well, it'd be okay if this was just me being over conscious of her.

Putting today's reward inside my purse, I left the guild.

As expected, I could feel envious gazes from all the men inside. Even though I don't have a relation of that kind with any of them. In the first place, isn't Feirona a man as well? Why am I the only one getting all the hate?

While thinking of such things, I finally was outside and at the entrance, Kudou was waiting for me. Was she being flirted with, she was surrounded by many men.

"....."

"....."

Giving a sidelong glance at her, I ignored her and began to walk away. At the same time, Kudou slipped through the

encirclement of men instantly. What incredible agility. The men were feeling surprised seeing the maid in front of them suddenly disappearing. What a wasteful use of the cheat-like physical abilities she has.

“How troublesome, you should’ve helped me, Hero.”(rin)

“That would be even more troublesome. Also, who the hell’s a Hero? I am not going to do anything as embarrassing as that.”

“Even though you used to, back then.”

“Back then, not anymore.”

That was one of my mistakes of my youth. Definitely.

[.....You guys resemble each other a lot, at times.]

While hearing Ermenhilde’s sigh mixed words, I thought about it. Even I am not as unmotivated as Kudou is, I think.

I sighed seeing Kudou return to her usual way of talking as compared to her talkativeness while in front of Ms Francesca. What a façade she has. She gets down just by not having beautiful women beside her. While in front of Utanosan or Aya, she’d tease me and at other times, she’d make moves on other women. And when no one’s around, she’d laze around at her own pace. What a troublesome personality she has. That hasn’t changed at all from back then. Well, certainly, a person’s personality doesn’t change in just 1 year.

“That aside..”

That Kudou, with her usual unenergetic voice spoke up. I'm still feeling uncomfortable due to the surrounding gazes you know? A maid and an adventurer. We really stand out too much.

“Who was that black haired girl?”(rin)

“Don't know. I met her today. Her name's Solnea it seems.”(renji)

Or rather, I definitely introduced her as well, didn't I? Did she not even hear me properly?

“fuuun.”

[Did you sense something?]

“Who knows.”

Even though she was the one who asked, she answered with lack of interest. I have a lot to say about her attitude but I know she's just that kind of person. I'll only get tired if I didn't get used to it.

“Leaving that aside, why the hell are you in a maid uniform?”(renji)

“It's easy to move in and it's no problem even if it gets dirty. Also, even if I sleep with it on, the wrinkles on the dress don't stand out.”(rin)

What a dreamless, hopeless answer. Seriously, apologise to all the maids in the world.



## Chapter 40: Gathering (2)

As I entered the castle, I felt a cold breeze caress my cheeks. The stone-made castle was extremely chilly, especially during winters. I wonder how cold do these iron armour clad knights are feeling standing as guard like that for so long.

While thinking of that, I walked beside Kudou through the corridor. Were they used to seeing Kudou's weird maid getup, as the passing by guards and nobles didn't seem to pay any attention towards her. It could be that they are mistaking her for my maid.....actually, it's very likely that that's the case. Even though I have no intention of ever hiring such a dangerous, unmotivated maid, ever. In the first place, I don't even have the option to do so.

“By the way, where is Utano-san right now?”(renji)

I came back to the castle since I was called but I realized that I hadn't asked where exactly she was in here. For now I was normally walking towards Utano-san's room but it'd be a pain if she wasn't actually there so I asked Kudou just in case. But the person herself seemed to maintain her usual tired-looking expression.

“Probably in her room?”(rin)

[You didn't even ask her?]

“She just asked me to bring you back after all.”

Saying that, she stopped walking. I did the same. Since,

coincidentally, we were no standing right at the crossroads of the corridors, all the guards' attention focused towards us making me feel a bit uncomfortable.

I looked at her asking 'what happened?' but she simply looked at me. It's difficult to even converse with her. She must have stopped on a whim, I'm sure.

"I actually have to go to the training grounds." (rin)

"You?" (renji)

[Now that's rare.]

"Well, rather than Yuuko-chan, that place seems to become more interesting after all." (rin)

Just then, a slight sense of emotion appeared on her face. It felt a bit devilish, like she was about to pull a prank—She's definitely going there just to tease someone.

At times like these, someone will definitely end up as a victim. The ones I could think of were me, Utano-san and Aya. Were children outside her aim or maybe she actually had some shred of conscience left in her yet, she didn't seem to tease Yui-chan ever. In a way, she plays the role of a helpful elder sister to her. That may be her true feelings as well though.

That aside, with this timing, is the victim going to be Aya?

"It's not Aya-chan." (rin)

Did my thoughts appear on my face? She answered me

before I even spoke.

But then, who else is left? I began thinking, but I soon realized that we were still standing in the middle of the corridor, that too, at the centre of a crossroad. Feeling the gazes of the nobles and knights passing through, I cleared my throat.

“Then, I’ll head towards Utano-san’s room.”(renji)

“Sure. You can see the grounds from her room as well, right?”(rin)

“Hm? Yeah..”

“When you get to her room, be sure to look from the window.”

Saying that, with light footsteps as if she was skipping, Kudou walked away. I could only tilt my head in confusion alone.

[What was that?]

“Who knows.”

I can’t really tell how her mind works anyways. That fact has never changed. It seemed to be the same for Ermenhilde as well thus the question. I didn’t have an answer and neither did Ermenhilde ask anything further.

Well, I’ll understand when I get to Utano-san’s room. I also began to walk. The training ground, training ground. Did something happen there? I was busy with my adventurer

jobs so I haven't had the chance to go to the barracks and talk to others making me feel a bit regretful.

As I kept on walking, I suddenly recalled that Souichi and the others should have reached here by now. I forgot due to the incident with Solnea but if I recall correctly, he was supposed to get here by noon.

“Is it Souichi?”

[Hm?]

“Kudou's prey. Souichi is supposed to get here today.”

[Oh right.]

Finally recalling that, I felt much more relaxed having figured it out. Though I wonder if there really was a need for me to worry about it that much. It was a small thing, but figuring out something still feels fulfilling. Well, the fact that I raised my voice in excitement a bit too much only to get the guards look at me weirdly was a bit embarrassing though.

Talking with Ermenhilde, I finally reached Utano-san's room. Knocking the door twice, a reply came soon enough. As I opened the door, I felt the warm air that comes from a fireplace burning.

“Hey there, Utano-san.”(renji)

“Hello Yamada-kun. Where's Rin-chan?”(yuuko)

“She had something to do at the training grounds apparently.”

[You know something Yuuko?]

“Not really. Since it’s the training grounds, she probably has some business with Souichi-kun or Yuuta-kun maybe?”

The first thing I noticed after entering her room was the giant spherical blue crystal on the table. Kept on a gold pedestal with intricate designing, one could tell at a single glance that it was extremely expensive. The first thing that came to my mind was that it resembled the crystal balls used by shady fortune tellers back in our own world. If Utano-san wore black robe and tried to act like one.....it’d actually suit her very well.

But still, that wasn’t here till yesterday. And it’s almost twice the size of my fist. Realizing my gaze, she stood up from her work desk and moved towards the table. When she pointed her palm towards the crystal, purple lightning flashed inside. Now it looks great and all, but I can’t tell anything just from that much you know? Though I can tell that it’s some sort of magic item.

“So what is it?”(renji)

“Purple, eh?”

Ignoring my question, she spoke that. By purple, she means the colour of that lightning eh? Looking at her again, I urged her to explain.

“The tournament table. Since it’d be a pain otherwise, I’m deciding it through magical energy colour.”(yuuko)

[.....tournament table?]

“For the martial art tournament of course.”(yuuko)

I was about to pray for her hearing her tired voice but then suddenly stopped. Wait, wait, wait a second.

“I’m not entering though?”(renji)

“Work for your debt.”

So I am not even allowed to have an opinion it seems. Well, it was my fault to fall into the debt. Actually, it was my bad to sell the sword I got from the king himself just cause I was low on money I guess? If it was a game, it’d be one of those items you cannot sell or will be stopped by the merchant himself, or something like that.

While thinking of that, I sat down on the chair near the table. But still, this really is one damn big crystal. I wonder how much you’d get if you were to sell it. Did I instantly think of that solely because I was currently in debt or simply because I naturally possessed the mind of a guy in poverty?

“Don’t make such a face. I’ll give you a proper reward for it as well.”(yuuko)

“Eh?”

“If you appear, it’ll be one silver coin. If you win, the prize is 5 silver coins so it isn’t exactly a bad deal for you, you know?”(yuuko)

Fumu, I see. I thought putting my finger to my chin. As she



said, there is merit for me as well. Above all, there's one silver coin just for appearing. Though it might vary depending on allotment of groups, but I doubt I can win the whole thing though. After all, I know for sure that Souichi, Aya and Masaki-chan will appear. I really can't win against those 3. Utano-san probably won't take part but maybe even Kuuki might enter it.

I don't what she thought of me as I pondered over such things, Utano-san ringed the bell kept on her desk. In a moment's notice, the door was knocked. A maid appeared from behind the door with, unlike Kudou, a refreshing smile on her face. As you'd expect, this is what a true maid is all about. Yeah.

Ordering some drinks and snacks from her, Utano-san sat down on the chair opposite of me on the other side of the table.

“So Kudou said you had some business with me?”(renji)

“This was it.”(yuuko)

[Participating in the tournament, eh?]

“Yes. I'll be counting on you to pull in lots of crowd okay?”(yuuko)

“Even if you tell me that so straight.....”

I can't feel happy at all. I am aware how many people are working hard just to enter this tournament but when she says it like that, I understood what she meant by it.

Though the Demon god is dead, it's only been an year after that. Just as there are people with hope, there are also those who are wounded and those who are still in despair. How should I say this, but the people of this world really need something they can completely rely on right now. And that would be the Goddess Astraera and her apostles, the 13 heroes. That is, us. Appearing in the tournament, she is basically asking for us to make a presence and stand out for the people. Seeing the people who saved the world, the masses would also feel more motivated. Or something like that.

I doubt it'd go that easily but it's true, it might have some effect.

“For the time being, if I have to face someone in the first round...”(renji)

“Souichi-kun or Masaki-chan, which one suits you better?”(yuuko)

“Souichi, I guess.”

[Are you aiming to win?]

“Don't ask for the impossible.”

The problem is me. I don't intend to let my guard down or anything but there's a heavy chance that I really might lose to some random adventurer or a student. Nobody wants to see a hero like that.

That's why when I asked Utano-san to face another one of

the heroes in the very first round, she quickly gave approval. It seems she has put some thought about it as well. So I guess it'd be the one silver coin for participating. With this pace, I'll be free of my debt after completing Utano-san's request 10 times eh?.....I doubt it'd be that easy.

Just then, the door was knocked again. The maid from before appeared. I could smell the soft fragrance of sweets. She gently placed the expensive looking teapot and cups on the table and then placed the plate filled with baked sweets. It really looks tasty.

As I gave a small thanks, the maid left the room after giving a bow.

“What is it?”(yuuko)

“Nothing, just, she was really different from Kudou.”(renji)

“Rin-chan is well...”

“She suddenly appeared in maid clothes at the guild. It was really embarrassing.”

“Well you have my condolences.”

Saying that in a voice that seemed to be enjoying it, she poured tea in the cups. Smelling the brilliant smell, I was about to pick the pot when Utano-san poured a cup for me as well. As I gave my thanks, she gave a small smile. She seems to be in a good mood. I also feel happy seeing her like this.

“But still, this world is inconvenient yet convenient in

weird places. Back in our world, we had to pay just to see a maid.”(renji)

[In your world, was money required just to meet maids?]

“Yeah.”

“.....”

Telephones, cars, internet; we don't have the convenience that comes from a developed civilisation but instead had magic and maids that appeared from a single ring from a bell. If you were to ask which is more convenient, I can't really answer.

While I was thinking of it, I suddenly felt a sharp stare coming from Utano-san's narrowed eyes.

“Have you visited such shops?”(yuuko)

“Shop?”

“You know, those shops where you get to meet maids by paying money, have you gone there before?”

“Oh. Nah, I never had the courage too.”

I didn't actually had the time to, either. I wasn't really completely focused on work but if you were to ask if I had a lot of free time, the answer would be 'No'. Really, what the hell had I been doing with my life? I don't even think of that nowadays. I've already forgotten all about it. I wonder if that's because I have accepted this world as a place where I can live.

Such gloomy thoughts. Holding the tea in my mouth for a while, I ended up gulping it all together.

“fuun.....”

[What happened, Yuuko?]

“Ah, nothing.”

Was she in deep thought? While I was distracted, Utano-san seemed to have been thinking about something while supporting her beautiful chin on her fingers. Ermenhilde asked her but her reply seemed to be a bit absent-minded.

While looking at her like that, I took another sip from my tea. And also one of the sweets kept here. It resembled the cookies I knew of. Though a bit smaller. As I ate it, it's faint sweet flavour spread inside my mouth and I ended up eating another one. These are really tasty.

Just then, I suddenly remembered what Kudou had said. I was supposed to look at the training grounds was I?

“Excuse me for a second.”(renji)

Saying that, I stood up and headed towards the window and looked through it. Just like my room, the training grounds were fully visible from her window.

It was easy to find Kudou. She's in a maid dress after all. There was only one like that at the grounds. And for some reason, that maid was currently hugging at Souichi's arm right now. Really, what the hell is she doing? Near Souichi were two women. One was Yyayoi-chan, Souichi's younger

sister. My enhanced eyesight, due to the cheat, showed me her cramped, or rather fake smiling face. How scary. From here, I could only see Souichi and Kudou's back but I'm pretty sure, the elder brother is currently making an extremely pale face right now. I could easily imagine it.

The other one was a woman, slightly older than Souichi and the others, with long black hair tied at the neck area. She was also wearing a blazer similar to Souichi and a skirt that ended just above her knees. Her bare legs were really dazzling to the eye. Where have I seen—I think that uniform is probably from one of the schools at Tactics City. This woman seemed to be laughing. I can't hear her so I'm not sure though. In her hands was a sword in a scarlet scabbard. It was a curved sword, a katana, that shouldn't normally exist in this world.

And the soldiers were looking at these 4 from a distance. Among them, Kuuki and Aya were also present. I feel like they should be stopping this but I guess they won't even if I was directly there. It's just too much fun to watch after all.

“Those guys get along, as usual.”

[Really?]

On my words, Ermenhilde answered with a question. Well, I'm pretty sure they do. How long has it been since I've seen this fight over Souichi?

How nostalgic. Well, Kudou's just there to instigate the other 2 though. As I gazed at them through the window,



Utano-san came close to my side. It ended up with both of us looking at them through the window.

“Well, since Yuuta’s there, it won’t end up bad I guess.”(yuuko)

“I doubt Kudou would instigate them so much in the first place though.”(renji)

She’s just having fun teasing Yayoi-chan and Masaki-chan. Was this what she wanted to show me? Just then, Kudou, looked towards us from the grounds. When our gazes met, she gave a wide smile with her usual half-open eyes. Just when I was wondering what was that about, she whispered something in Souichi’s ears. Suddenly, with a surprised face, Souichi looked towards us. Kudou, what the hell did she say to him?

“It seems the children are having fun.”(yuuko)

[.....Really?]

“They playing around energetically, aren’t they?”

Can you call that playing around? I do think they’re energetic but it’s a bit different isn’t it?

Currently, [Demonic Sword User] Masaki-chan was manifesting a demonic sword in her hand so I doubt we could call it ‘playing around’ anymore. Well, she hasn’t unsheathed it yet so it’s fine right?

Going by the colour of her scabbard, it should be a fire type sword. If she drew that out, a part of the training ground will

become charcoal.

“Oh well, whatever.”

I had lots of things to say but I decided to just let it go. I'm sure Souichi will deal with it somehow. Do your best, Brave-sama. It's the privilege of the Brave hero to have trouble with women.

While thinking of that, I sat back down on my chair. I took a sip from my now cold tea, but it was still pretty tasty. As expected of the royal castle, the tea leaves used are top class.

“Oh right, I needed to discuss something with you as well, utano-san.”(renji)

“What is it?”

“umm, do you have a map?”

“Map? Why?”

“I found a new cave. Probably, it's a very recent one, that someone made with magic, I think.”

“.....What's this about?”

Saying that she stood up and brought out a map neatly kept in one of the drawers in her desk. Since the crystal was in the way, I picked it up to move it away somewhere else. Looking around, for the time being, I decided to keep it on the bookshelf near the window.

“Ah, be careful with that. It's very costly okay?”(yuuko)

[Use both of your hands to hold it, fool!]

Yeah yeah. Giving a half-hearted reply, I decided to place it carefully on the work desk in the end. If it's expensive, bookshelves won't do, yeah. If I broke it here, my debt will rise yet again. It's normal that I instantly thought like that.

“So, where did you find this new cave?”(yuuko)

“hm, umm, let's see..”(renji)

I looked over at the full map. It's not very different from what I had seen some time ago. A few new places have been added as well but those are mostly lakes or forests we marked as landmarks while on our journey back then. The map lacks a proper measurement scale though, so it's not that reliable.

Leaving that aside, as expected, even on Utano-san's map there was no indication of the cave where we found Solnea sleeping. So it really is a brand new cave. Well, it's not that deep and there isn't anything inside it now either though.

“The cave was somewhere around here, I think.”

While standing beside Utano-san, who was sitting on a chair, I pointed towards the location of the cave. East of the capital, near the [plains of death] where we once battled a descendant of the Demon God. 2 yrs ago, we fought the strongest Demon on the Imnesia continent there.

But it seems even Utano-san remembered that there was no cave there before since she looked at me doubtfully.

“.....I'll send the soldiers to check it out, just in

case.”(yuuko)

“Yeah, do that. That cave seemed really suspicious.”(renji)

“Suspicious?”

“It seemed to have been made with magic, it wasn’t there when I went there 2-3 days ago, and above all there was a person living inside a crystal in the cave.”

“A person inside a crystal?”

I only shrugged my shoulders when she asked that back to me. Well it’s only normal I guess. Humans, normally, can’t exactly survive inside crystals after all. Then what was she?

Thinking about Solnea, I brought out a fragment of that crystal and placed it on the table.

“This is?”(yuuko)

“It’s a fragment of the giant crystal inside which the person was sleeping. It broke when they woke up.”

“.....You can’t expect me to believe this so suddenly.”

Saying that, she picked up the crystal and brought it close to her eye, examining it looking like an expert.

[Can you sense anything? I can’t even sense magical energy from it anymore.]

“Anymore? It had magical energy before?”(yuuko)

[Yeah. I definitely felt it. Though the magician in our party didn’t feel it.]

“Hmm..”

Softly, her flaxen hair swayed even though there was no wind inside the room. Magical energy. Most probably, Utano-san must have put in magical energy inside the crystal.

But there was no visible change in the crystal. After some time had passed, Utano-san gave a small sigh and the slightly oppressing feeling of her magical energy disappeared.

“Looks like a normal crystal to me.”(yuuko)

“It’d be great if that was true. The person is currently staying with us for now. Above all, according to them, they are also suffering from amnesia.”

“.....How troublesome. Amnesia, eh? I want to meet them once.”

“That’d be really helpful. Should I come here with them tomorrow?”

“Yes, do that. Let’s take care of all such troubles before the tournament starts.”

Saying that, she put down the crystal fragment back on the table. Solnea--the woman who was sleeping inside the crystal. That alone was suspicious enough, but she’s also an amnesiac. She gets full points for being suspicious. Suddenly, I felt Utano-san staring at me again.

“Eh, umm, what?”(renji)

“This person, she wouldn’t happen to be a woman would they?”(yuuko)

[How did you know? It’s as you say.]

“.....”

What’s up with that heavy sigh!

“Again, eh?”(yuuko)

“Somehow it feels like you’re making this out to be my fault but it’s just my imagination right?”(renji)

“Yes, of course, you did nothing wrong. Nothing at all, okay?”(yuuko)

[What happened? Yuuko?]

“Nothing, I’m just a bit tired.”(yuuko)

No, seriously, I didn’t even see Solnea as a proper woman. Giving a wry smile at Utano-san’s reactions, I drank more tea while hiding my lips with the teacup.

If I told this to Aya, will I get the same reaction as well?



## Chapter 41: Gathering (3)

Saying that she had work to do now, Utano-san drove me out of her room. As I left the warm room, the corridor felt colder than normal making me rub my hands together.

I recalled Utano-san's expression while she drove me out of her room. I feel like her gaze was 3 times more colder than usual. Did Solnea's case weigh that much on her mind. There are hardly many things that can make Utano-san worry though.

Sighing, and thinking about some way to lift her mood again, I headed towards the Training grounds. Might as well go and meet Souichi and the others as well. I should show my face to O'brien-san as well. Since he was busy with his Knight duties and I spent more time at the guild, we somehow had yet to meet. If I delayed it any longer I feel like he'll get angry and yell at me.

Even though he's reaching his fifties, he's still active in the field. I can't even tell what would happen when he gets angry.

When I showed up at the grounds, Kuuki came towards me with a surprised face. Aya also came alongside him.

When I saw Aya, I recalled my conversation with Utano-san.....about Solnea. For a second, I couldn't think of a way to start a conversation with her. In the meantime, Aya came right in front of me and looked up towards me. Her side

ponytail swayed around energetically showing off her girlish charm.

“Did something happen?”(aya)

“Hm?”

“No, you look like you’re worrying about something.”(aya)

I am. Yes. Wait, can I say that I am actually worried?

I recalled how Utano-san questioned me about various things regarding my relationship with Solnea. Seriously, I met her just today. In fact, I didn’t just ‘meet’ her like normal people do either. It’d be better to say that I took her under my protection for now.

While thinking of that, I gave a smile towards Aya as thanks for worrying about me. At that, Aya also blushed and gave a shy smile. Really, Aya’s pureness heals me.

“So, what happened?”

“Oh yeah, Kuuki, just listen to this..”(renji)

“.....uwahh. I don’t want to.”(kuuki)

While getting healed by Aya, I tried to speak to Kuuki but he just made an unpleasant face openly. Goddamnit, this heartless bastard.

Back then, he used to listen to me with such a happy smile. It must be that. He must have gotten complacent after getting in the relationship with the princess. I guess that’s also growth in a way. How envious. Just get married already.

Then, I'll give all my blessings (curses) to you.

“I helped someone and ended up worsening Utano-san's mood.”(renji)

“Just quietly apologise to her.”

“.....”

“It must be another woman again, right?”

He didn't even think before speaking as if it actually was all my fault. Oh well, I guess this isn't the first time something like this has happened so I guess they are not to blame.

To save someone, you need power. Whether it be fighting power, monetary, or fame/reputation. It is definitely necessary. Back then, I was lacking in all of them yet wanted to save others so I ended up trying to save them all anyway. As a result I ended up displeasing Utano-san countless times. And I can't even deny that none of those were women related matters either.

I am a man after all. I can't help but lend a hand to a woman in distress. Makes me motivated as well. All the more so if it is a beauty. No, I did save many men as well, okay? But still, I guess my image inside Utano-san's head is still that of a 'womanizer'. Even though it's mostly unintentional.

“.....What kind of a person do you take me for?”(renji)

What the hell did he mean by 'must be another woman' and 'again', huh? It's like I only try to save women. I actually

do try to save people regardless of their gender you know?  
What a rude guy. While I was talking to Kuuki, my right sleeve was lightly pulled. It was Aya.

But right now, Aya was not showing her smile from before and was looking at me with a somewhat troubled face.

[What is it, Aya?]

“Ah, umm.....”

I’m guessing she must be curious about the person I saved.

She wants to ask but must be feeling embarrassed to do so. Her reaction felt so cute that even I felt that it was bad of me to just keep on looking at her like this and not doing anything.

[Don’t trouble Aya too much, Renji.]

“I don’t intend to. I’ll answer as long as she properly asks.”(renji)

“Uuu.....”

[That’s exactly what’s troubling her you fool, seriously!]

When I gave a laugh seeing Aya at a loss for words after what Ermenhilde said, Ermenhilde sighed at me. Looking at our exchange, Kuuki gave a wry smile as well. Aya finally calmed down as well as her expression became lighter after taking a deep breath. Just then, after a sound of explosion rang followed by the cheering of the soldiers. Judging from the people at the grounds right now and the sound that just

came, it must be Masaki-chan's demonic sword. It must be one her abilities.

I'd be worried if her opponent was someone normal but if its Souichi, he'd be able to parry her properly. The other two with me seemed to be of the same opinion as they didn't seem to show any signs of panicking. We casually moved to become a part of the encircling crowd of soldiers as well. Surprised from my sudden appearance maybe, the crowd of soldiers split in two to give me a way through. Feeling all of their gazes accumulate towards me, I scratched my head in displeasure and flinched for a moment. Kuuki and Aya seemed to be used to this as they walked down the path created by the soldiers normally. As I quickly followed those two, I saw Souichi and Masaki-chan exchanging sword blows in the centre. In their hands were a blue Holy sword and a scarlet demonic sword. Well, in this case, it'd be appropriate to call hers a Demonic katana.

Yayoi-chan and Kudou were standing a bit far away while talking with each other. As usual, yayoi-chan's smile seemed to be a bit scary. Well leaving those two aside, I turned towards the two who were slashing at each other at a speed difficult to follow with human eyes.

With a shrill sound, sparks flew over the field and ground was gouged out every time they moved around while kicking the field. Seeing as neither of their swords were enveloped in the usual blue flames and scarlet flames, I could tell that they weren't even serious right now. They are just testing

each other. Something like that. But even at that, every slash split the air and blasted the stone ground. The soldiers around had taken measures to not get damaged but it still looked dangerous for them. I don't know what Kudou said to incite them but right now, both of them were only trying to see each other's growth. Looking closely, both of them were actually smiling at each other while using deadly slashes at each other. They are confident that their opponent could dodge attacks of this level.

We were foreigners. Summoned from another world, receiving the divine protection of the goddess, and received powers and abilities alien to the residents of this world. That gift was much lesser inside me but even I would never lose to some random guy. But the remaining twelve were different. Especially these two in front of me, even more so. Even though they are holding back, they were still at a level not a single person here could hope to reach. In close combat, not even Kuuki or Aya can win against those two. They lack people who possess the same level of strength. That's why they enjoy training against each other so much. The shrill sound of swords clashing and the roaring explosions of flames made my eardrums vibrate. Did they start concentrating more, I am unable to catch even the sound of clashing swords right now. Every move was so fast. While swing their sword at a speed that left after images, they kept on fighting while smiling and truly enjoying it. But even that won't continue forever. Masaki-chan was the first one to realize my presence. Even though they were fighting at

unimaginable speeds, I could tell that our eyes met for a split second. And at that split second, her movements dulled. Souichi wasn't naïve enough to let go of that opening. That guy has timid personality but he would never ever let an opening in the enemy's defences go unpunished. He had the strength to fully utilise that opening in his favour. He possessed the sense to know exactly when to go for the finishing blow. And following it, Souichi rushed in towards Masaki-chan. She countered with a super fast thrust aiming for his head.

The finale came in an instant. Slipping through the thrust of the katana, the blue blade was thrust right underneath Masaki-chan's throat. The sound of swords stopped and silence came over the ground.

"I surrender. It's my loss." (masaki)

"Alright!" (souichi)

The silence was broken by Masaki-chan's surrender and Souichi's shout of joy. After all that action, they seem to be only slightly out of breath. Their bodies made them almost unable to feel fatigue. The remaining soldiers simply stared at them in a daze. This was what Hero was like. The Brave who saved the world. The humans who were the hope of the people. In their gazes were feelings of respect and aspiration, and excitement.

After a while, the soldiers returned back to their training while heated up from the battle they saw. The Brave and The



Demonic Sword user. The battle between the two Heroes that stood at the front lines swing their swords during the journey to subjugate the Demon God. It's only normal to get motivated seeing such a battle.

“Yo.”(renji)

“Mouu, don't appear so suddenly just when it was getting good, Yamada-san.”(masaki)

“.....was that my fault?”(renji)

“Just when I was getting all excited, I lost all concentration after all.”

[It's your fault to have lost concentration though, isn't it?]

“Muuu.”

Cutely puffing her cheeks, she, Hisaki Masaki, quickly returned to showing a sweet energetic smile. The Demonic Sword user who wished the goddess for [A sword that can tear through even fate]. If in recall correctly, her house was a shrine but she herself lacked any such ladylike manners. If I had to say, she was more like the big sister type of girl. Even now, she was simply laughing off her loss to Souichi. Inside, she must be planning to take revenge for the loss later though.

She's a sore loser but strong willed. I think back then she used to say “I'm a Miko!” a lot. Well with her long black hair, a miko dress would definitely suit her a lot. But her personality is another case altogether. She's the type of

woman who's idea of fun is to fight Souichi with swords. And she's easy to read. To speak specifically, she's the type to quickly take action and jump directly at a horde of monster and start swinging around her sword. She's actually more manly than even me, in a sense.

“Huh, Renji-niichan. When did you come here?”(souichi)

And Souichi was surprised, finally realizing I was here. Just how concentrated to the fight were you? Well, that's a part of his strength though. But still, seeing him stand beside Masaki-chan, did this guy really not grow much in terms of height in the past one year? He's actually a bit shorter than her. Not to mention that he has a androgynous face which resembles her sisters face. It might be amusing to make him crossdress sometime.

Well, if I did that, I would be literally killed by Masaki-chan and Yayoi-chan though.

“I came here just now. Was watching your fight.”(renji)

“Yeah, I won!”

“Kuhh.”(masaki)

Saying that, he raised his hand in the air. Beside him, Masaki-chan made a regretful face but since it'd only spell more trouble for me if said something stupid, so I kept my mouth shut. After all, they'll have a rematch sooner or later anyway. I also raised my right hand and did a high five with Souichi. As usual, he didn't seem to hold back at all making my hand hurt for no reason. I didn't show it on my face but

she must have realized it as Kudou gave a stifled laugh. Goddamn her. She's unusually receptive only at such weird things. When I gave a light glare to the beautiful maid, she came towards me with a rare amused face. She must have enjoyed teasing Souichi seeing that she didn't have her usual expressionless face. What a shitty personality. Alongside her, yayoi-chan came walking towards us as well. With Aya already beside me, it felt nice being surrounded by beautiful girls. Kudou is, well, like that though. It's a pain to know someone true personality as well I guess. Even though her face is good. Just her face, though.

“Long time no see, Renji-san.”(yayoi)

“Yayoi-chan as well, good to see you safe and sound again.”(renji)

“Yes. Thank you for protecting Aya-chan as always.”(yayoi)

As she gave a bow saying that, I felt a bit embarrassed. I was the one who was protected in the end though. But I hesitated to say that as well, and in the end I could only scratch my cheek.

My reaction must have been amusing as Yayoi-chan gave an elegant laugh. Even though she's not some high noble lady or anything yet Yayoi-chan exuded elegance always. She was a true Yamato Nadeshiko. I guess, it wasn't weird that someone like her would get the title of [Saint] either. Well, all that instantly disappears when it comes to anything that involves Souichi though.

“You always get provoked so easily by Rin-chan.....I was worried, yayoi.”(aya)

“I’m sorry, Aya-chan.”(yayoi)

Aya-chan joined our conversation as well. She didn’t show any signs of being timid though, in fact her smile almost felt like it was still poisonous. Well, she must have known that Kudou was intentionally trying to mess with them when she clung to Souichi. But if you knew, why did you still go along with her anyway? To end up provoked anyway, I guess ‘love is blind’ after all.

As I looked at the children talking with smiles, I felt like I had gotten older. Even though I’m used to this scene. 3 years ago, after getting summoned here, this was just any normal conversation between my comrades. How nostalgic this feels. Must be because I stayed away from them for the past one year. While I was thinking of that, I brought out Ermenhilde from my pocket and gently caressed the medal. Right after getting summoned, nobody thought about the danger we’d be putting our lives at and simply enjoying facing each other with swords. How very nostalgic indeed.

[What happened?]

“No, it’s nothing.”(renji)

I felt a bit sad when I thought of it as well. I couldn’t even properly reply to Ermenhilde’s worried voice. How hopeless am I? Even though I had chosen Ermenhilde above all of them and had put distance between us all. In the end, I’m

back here again. I don't feel bad about it, in fact I am enjoying it as well. It's fun to adventure alongside Ms Francesca and the others but to be so close with my trusted comrades felt so comfortable. Above all, it made me remind that place I will always return to will always be here.

“Oi Kuuki, do you know where O'brien-san is?”(renji)

“The Commander?”(kuuki)

“I need to meet with him sooner or later after all.”

“That's true. Though both of you had bad timing, he really has been wanting to meet you again, you know?”

“.....that, sounds really scary on its own though.”

When I said that, Kuuki gave a laugh. Since I received the least amount of abilities from our gifts, I had been taught by O'brien-san the most. He must be laughing remembering that. Goddamn him.

“But, today might be difficult though.”(kuuki)

“Why?”

“It's been really busy today after all. Must be due to the demon Souichi-kun brought here today, I guess.”

Oh yeah, there was that as well. I see. Recalling that Utano-san seemed to be busy as well, I scratched my head. She must have been looking out for me. Even though she has scary eyes, she's the kindest of us all after all. Though she'd probably bury me if I said that to her face.

After talking to Kuuki, I decided to slowly walk away without letting the kids happily talking notice me. But, just when I was about to leave the grounds, Aya found me.

“I’ll go with you.”(aya)

“Ah, hm, no, I’ll go alone.”(renji)

“.....I’m not allowed?”

“No.”

Even if you look at me like that, I cannot take her where I’m about to go. If I did, Utano-san really will get angry at me. Aya seemed to understand where I was headed as well since she didn’t insist any further. I have never shown her that place ever but she must be vaguely aware of my destination. Or maybe, she knows very well where exactly I’m going.

Aya wasn’t a child anymore. Souichi and the others weren’t either. A time comes when you have show them the dark side of humans but for now, I want them to happily spend their lives as teenagers. That may be for just my own self-satisfaction though.

“Say, are you free tonight?”(renji)

“Eh? Eh, um??”(Aya)

“How about we go for dinner together?”(renji)

But still, then why do I go through the trouble of following up like this just after I made her feel a bit sad. I’m a bit too

clever, if I say so myself. It's because of things like this that my relationship with both Utano-san and Aya was so unsteady. It's not like we're still back to the way we were a year ago either. I just keep on taking advantage of the gentleness of these women.

Doing a complete turnaround from her previous expression, Aya gave a wide smile. Yeah, this definitely suits her better. I suddenly felt gazes at me and on looking around I saw Souichi and Kudou laughing while looking at me. Seriously, what kind of misunderstandings do they have now?

"I need to show myself at Toudou's place as well after all. Shall we go together?"(renji) (T/N: in case you guys have forgotten, Toudou is the cook of the 13)

"With pleasure!"(aya)

"I see. Then we'll go there before the sun sets."

Saying that, I left the grounds. Aya will definitely get teased by Souichi and the others but it only made me feel lighter. The place I'm heading to is a depressing place so I want to be in as high of a mood as possible. As a reward for myself, I'll also get to go to dinner with a beauty like Aya later as well. So let's be strong.

[You sure have a way with words.]

"Not really, I didn't have any ill-intent either. I just didn't want to leave her feeling down, that's all."



Was it just my imagination that I sensed a slight bit of irritation in Ermenhilde's voice? Was that because I treated Aya like a kid or because I had a date for dinner planned with her?

The place I was heading to was underground. The place was cold and felt extremely eerie; probably because I have not a single good memory of while being underground. Fighting undeads, getting attacked by slimes, getting drenched in sewage and filth, and almost getting buried alive. Just recalling it all made me truly thank the fact that I was still alive.

[If that was the case, why not just take Aya with you?]

"It's cold underground. I'll be scolded by Utano-san if I let Aya catch a cold or something."

[Don't say things you don't even mean.....It's really painful to be treated like a child you know?]

Did those words come from personal experience, I wonder? Ermenhilde's voice seemed to be gloomy and sad. I wasn't really joking about catching a cold though. When I simply shrugged my shoulders, Ermenhilde gave a fed up sigh.

"But well, to adults, children will always remain children."

Just like how Astraera said that you were precious. But still she.....—-I shook my head, I can't let my thoughts go in that direction. That was what I should have asked her when I lost Eru and gained Ermenhilde but never was able to. I simply did not have the courage to do so. No, I simply

couldn't accept what the Demon Lord and the Goddess told me. And even after a year, the Dragon King told me the same thing. I haven't grown at all. I haven't progressed at all.

But soon.....it's about time to finally move ahead. While I'm here in the capital, when there are people who know me by my side, I end up thinking like that. What a useless adult I am. I truly think that from the bottom of my heart. Even Souichi and the others are still giving their all while living in this world.

[What happened?]

“Nothing. I was just thinking that a jail is definitely not a place where you take children.”

.  
. .

The people were overrun by the Demon God, they shivered in the freezing cold, their houses were burnt away, their cattle was killed, and they had no choice but to keep on living with very little support. It was considered fortunate to just be alive. Many lost their children and kids lost their parents. People would cooperate with their friends and neighbours, and help each other out. The threat of monsters was still present as ever. And the danger to their life had not disappeared yet either.

But, that doesn't mean that there was no crime in this

world. Theft, murder, rape, etc etc. the darkness of human beings was always there. It was an unchangeable fact. If there are rich people then there were also poor people. There are those who wish for money, for blood and for power. It was a neverchanging truth of the world. And just like there are those who don't lose themselves to these thoughts, there will always be those who do.

The stone corridors in the castle were cold but the jails created to imprison criminals felt even colder. As I walked through it while using my winter-use fur mantle to cover my body, the criminals captured in the cells were making noise by hitting the iron bars of their cells. The sound was truly irritating. Since the only source of light was a dim lamp stuck on the wall, I could feel the eyes of the inmates glowing as they tried to attract my attention. The number of cells was not less than 20. I haven't really counted them but in any case, more than half of them were currently occupied by criminals. These were humans who'd hurt people of their own race even though the world was still under the threat of monsters. I know that sometimes there is no choice for people but to take such a path but that doesn't mean I sympathise with them. I'm sure they are also victims of some tragedy but there must be many that were victims of these people as well.

The cells had nothing more than a few blankets to be used and a dirty basin as a replacement for toilets. And every cell was filled with 5-10 criminals each. These criminals ranged

from humans, dwarves and beastmen as well. There weren't any elves probably because since they can use magic, they need to be put into jails made for magic users. The freezing cold must be deadly but they're paying for their own mistakes. Even after saving the world, saving humans, we cannot save criminals no matter what. What an empty feeling.

I started feeling a bit down again. I was right to have not brought Aya here. It's still far too early for that child. The same goes for Souichi and others.

[As usual, it's a really depressing and dark place.]

"It is a jail after all."

That's the kind of place a jail is. It can't be helped. I felt like Ermenhilde's voice tried to imply to me that she wanted to return as fast possible. Well, even I wouldn't be here if I didn't have something to do after all.

As I kept on walking through the corridor while ignoring the pleading cries from the criminals, a much more noticeably sturdy jail came into my sights. There were five of those. The bars of the cell weren't made from iron but from Mithril instead. And these bars were engraved with complicated looking patterns and letters forming a spell. I couldn't read them but I think they're letters used by Elves. The magic engraved is [Sealing]. Inside those, the use of magic was impossible. It's a place to keep magic using criminals. They were big enough to have ten people inside

one cell at the same time. I could also see one of those cells was currently occupied by a few people as well. When I came closer, they realized of my presence as well as one soldier opened up the cell gate for me.

“.....Yamada-kun..”

“Hello, Utano-san.”

Saying that, I entered. Inside the cell, there was also an aged knight and 5 armoured soldiers behind him. And Utano-san as well. The last one was—I couldn’t tell properly due to the dim lighting but it was probably that demon we captured back at the Magic City. His hands had been bound behind his back and he was currently lying flat on the ground of the cell. The place near his stomach had blood seeping out. Seeing as no treatment had been done, it’s probably as a means to torture him. Confirming the current situation with a quick glance, I turned towards the most highest ranking aged knight standing here.

“It has been a long time, O’Brien-dono.”(renji)

“You shouldn’t bow your heads to others so easily, Renji-dono.”(ob) (T/N:’ob’ for O’Brien )

But still, such formal way of talking really doesn’t suit us. O’Brien-san must be thinking of the same thing as he cleared his throat and shook his body a bit. The full body mithril armour made a noise as it moved. He’s one head shorter than me but I’m hundred percent sure than underneath that armour is a body far more muscular and well built than

mine. The full body armour he's wearing would probably make me unable to even move if I tried wearing it.

Imnesia kingdom Knight Order, Knight Commander O'brien Arbelia. Currently at the age of 48, he was still a man to fight directly at the front lines of a battle. Well respected by even the king himself, he was also adored by every soldier. He was the centre piece of the whole Knight Order, one could say. By the way he's also something like my master who taught me how to fight. I can still remember how he used to train me from day to night, continuously striking at me regardless of the fact that I was one those supposed heroes. Souichi and others could already fight above the level of a normal soldier right from the start but he was worried about me since I couldn't. By the way, at night I would be the great library to learn about this world's language and script, its history, ecology of monsters, basics of magic etc; all of that was hammered into my head..... It's amazing I actually lasted till the end. Well done, me. When I think back about it I realize how much overworked I was. Well, thanks to that we were able to survive our journey and can now live on like this though.

“You should consider your position more, Saviour.”(ob)

[Seriously.]

“No, well, acting prideful and full of swagger really doesn't suit me, I think.”(renji)

“No need to be full of swagger. Everyone knows that

doesn't you at all. But, it's important to be prideful though. No matter how much you try to run away from it, you will always remain as one of the 13 Heroes after all."(ob)

I felt my mouth cramp a bit when he said 'runaway'. Well he's true though. Whether it be Fafnir or him, people older than me are really not gentle towards me. But well, that'd be troubling in its own way I guess.

Unable to refute what he said, I averted my gaze and looked towards the demon lying on the ground. His expression was one of surprise for a second, then quickly changed to that of one filled with hatred and anger.

"For one, I am just an adventurer now and you, O'brien-san, are the commander of the Knights Order after all. Don't you have a higher status than me?"(renji)

"Compared to a aged knight to the hero who saved the world, it's you with the higher status, you fool."(ob)

I felt a bit pity for the soldiers standing behind him panicking and confused from our conversation. For the time being, I'd be happier if you'd just ignore me and continue with the torture though. No wait, it's not like I enjoy seeing that or anything either though.

I wonder what she thought about me as Utano-san came close to me and whispered into my ears.

"Why are you here?"(yuuko)

"If this is related to the Demon God, I come under people



concerned with it after all.”(renji)

Even if I run away from the title of a Hero, I don't want to run away from the Demon God. Not because I'm an Apostle of the goddess, neither because I'm a god-slayer.....simply because I'm a human who was summoned to this world. Because that's the path she chose. Because that is what she wished for. And because that was her wish, that I was unable to fulfil.

“Yamada Renji!!”(demon)

“.....again, eh?”

I wonder if it's popular among demons to call me like that with my full name nowadays. I feel like Shelfa.....the Demon Lord also called me by my full name. Ignoring his hatred filled gaze, I took a few steps back. And as if exchanging for me, O'brien-san and the soldiers came forward. It made me feel sick just thinking about what's going to happen next but still, I must face it.

“As usual, you're hated by demons with a passion, eh?”

“Well, I did kill their God after all.”

I killed the God they worshipped. There should be no limit to their hatred for me. To us humans, that'd be like demons killing the Goddess. Nobody would want to accept that, nobody would even want to acknowledge something like that. That's why they'll point their hatred towards the person responsible. Even though we are always trying to kill each other, I still can't get used to getting hated like this though.

But still, this is fine I think. As long as that hatred is pointed towards just me and not towards Utano-san or Souichi and others.

Utano-san gave a sigh but O'brien-san paid no heed to it as he kicked the demon on the ground. There were no civil rights here. Humans, Demihumans, Beastmen and Demons were in relationship of hating each other and killing each other. It's already decided what'll happen when you get captured like this.

Even back in our world, during the world wars, people did unspeakable and inhumane things. And considering here they aren't even of the same race, there were no constraints in releasing your hatred. I can understand why the Goddess was so worried. Will a day come when no one will work together with each other anymore?

"So, did you learn something?" (renji)

"Nothing at all. His mouth is tight shut." (ob)

[Not surprising really.]

I agreed with Ermenhilde's words. That demon will be killed in the end anyway. He won't give out info advantageous to us at any cost.

Was a way to gently persuade him otherwise really impossible? When I looked towards Utano-san, she simply shook her head. In the first place, there's no guarantee that he actually has any info that could satisfy us. Controlling that many monsters and even having the ability to summon

a demon God's descendant was real but everything else seemed to shoddy. This demon must be a disposable pawn. Maybe he was simply working solo. If not, Souichi should have been attacked while he brought the demon here.

O'brien-san seemed to understand that fact as well. After interrogating a bit more, he'll probably end it.

"Oh, right."(renji)

Recalling something, I brought out the fragment of crystal I had. It's the fragment of the crystal that had Solnea sleeping in it. There's too much I don't know about this, so I should ask about it. I squatted down near him and showed him the crystal.

"This seem familiar to you?"(renji)

".....what's that?"(ob)

"A little something."(renji)

While listening to O'brien-san I studied the demon's expression closely. It was completely dyed in hatred towards me and showed no change.

"What about the name Solnea?"(renji)

"Don't know. Even if I did, who would tell that to the likes of you?"(demon)

"I don't trust your words either but, well, your emotions show on your face so it doesn't really matter."(renji)

Saying that, I stood up.

No luck here, I guess. While playing with the crystal fragment with my fingers, I thought about what that girl could be. Since there is literally no info about her, I won't suddenly find an answer either. I wonder what Utano-san was thinking as she gave a sidelong glance towards me. Is she being suspicious of me again?

# Chapter 42: Fighting Tournament (1)

My right shoulder that had been hit just now felt hot due to the pain and continued robbing my concentration. It's been 1 week since we have been summoned to this world. For the past few days, I have been practicing how to use a sword during the day.

At the centre of the training ground, I looked at the middle aged knight standing in front of me as I panted for breath. Whether it be the other soldiers practicing here or Souichi and the others, all of them are more used to using weapons than me. They seemed much natural at it than me. And all of them were looking at me, with inquisitiveness.

While holding the dull edged training-use sword with both hands, I adjusted my breathing.

I took deep breaths thrice; my heart started beating faster, as if asking me to take a break already. But ignoring it, I took a stance with the sword. Wearing the mithril armor, the aged knight's seemed to be not tired at all as he swung around his training sword, checking its condition. In fact, he seemed to be having fun. He was enjoying practicing with me. Even though I was beaten around all over the place, getting blown away, making my body hurt like hell. The sword he held was thicker and longer than mine as well. Even though it should be so much more heavier, he seemed to be having an easy time with it. This guy is definitely not normal. This over energetic, contrary to his age, knight's name was O'brien

Arbelia.

“Good good. It’s nice to be young, eh. I was worried that you’d be all cocky since you are titled a hero but not bad, you have some guts.”(ob)

“Why, thank you.”(renji)

“Kuku. It’s not always that I compliment someone, you know? You should be more happy, yamada-dono.”

“At night, I’ll secretly get happy about this alone.”

Few days after getting summoned to this world, I learnt many things while fighting with this old man. This man was a bully.

If I were to relax from those words, he would beat the shit out of me, no questions asked. And as usual, I’d end up rolling on the ground. Such a precise vision rose in my head that my face cramped a bit.

Even though he’s shorter than me, when facing him like this, I’m the one who feels smaller. His presence and pressure was in a different level. He wasn’t a human like me who depended on cheats given by the goddess to fight. His strength came from his mental and physical skills he forged through years of continuous training. He held such things with him.

My body hurts like hell, and I’m really tired but I’m still thankful to him for training me. Other soldiers would always hold back against me out of formality and Souichi and others

were so strong that it wouldn't even be called training.

“C'mon, start again.”(ob)

“.....guh.”

As if taunting me, his sword's tip swayed around. Will he rush towards me, or will he try to over pressure me mentally. I wonder if my hesitating reactions were funny as O'brien-san gave a short laugh.

Due to his sword's tip being in the way, I couldn't close in on him and everytime he took a step forward I ended up taking one back. I know this will end up with me being beaten around again if it continues like this but my body just didn't move. Even if it was just a blunt sword for training, it still hurt when I got hit, and above that, there was the fear that with O'brien-san's strength, he could cut through me, flesh and bones, even with this.

“Yamada-san, do your best!!”

“Commander, show us your cool side once again!”

Hearing the latter words, O'brien-san casually waved his hand towards them. How relaxed. Even with me as an opponent, I guess he doesn't really need to focus that much.

Souichi called my name as well but I didn't have the composure to reply back. Just focusing at the distance between us alone was already more than I could handle right now. Sweat dripped down my cheek as I put more strength in my grip holding the sword.



“Oioi, we’re just training, not trying to kill each other. Be more at ease.”

“—even if you say that.”

“You don’t retreat yet don’t face forward to take the initiative either. What you lack, first and foremost, is resolve.”

Being told that, I gulped the saliva in my mouth. Yeah, that’s right. I recalled the events that led to me getting trained by him. In this world, filled with monsters, danger at every corner, and where death is always by your side, to survive in such a world, and so that I don’t become a burden, I wished to become stronger.

Hearing O’Brien-san’s words, I breathed out and calmed my mind. I couldn’t calm myself completely but I resolved myself. I stepped forward. I faced his sword. To cut, get cut, kill, get killed. A battle with lives on the line. I still lacked the full resolve to do that but at this moment, I stepped forward.

“here I come.”(renji)

“No need for an announcement. Just come at me, you fool.”

O’Brien-san took a stance. That said, he only put his sword on his shoulder. It was his natural stance. It seemed to lack strength, yet the pressure only increased. This man’s sword was incredible. Every single attack was a sure kill swing. If you took it on, you’ll be destroyed along with your sword. You’ll get cut apart with your armour. It would be suicide. But I lacked the ability to dodge it as well. But even then, I

have no choice but to step forward. To prove that I have the resolve.

I wonder if he was aware of my thoughts, as his face showed lots of composure. While giving an enjoying laugh, he remained calm as always. Facing him, I rushed in straightforward. The goddess's divine protection and the power of the cheat were both almost non-existent in me right now. I only had physical ability slightly better than normal. And as I rushed in with all my strength, the old man very calmly took action. Just when I thought that his sword moved, the very next moment he struck it on the ground. Dust cloud rose to block my vision.

But, I had seen through that attack. Turning around towards my blind spot towards my right shoulder, I gripped my sword tightly. I hesitated for a second. Pointing a sword towards a human still tired me mentally. But I let go of those thoughts, and swung my sword. With a clank, a shock that almost numbed my hand ran through. My sword slash had been swung away with a strike from his sword that had moved at an untraceable speed. Just a second ago it was sticking in the ground, just what kind of trick is this!? My eyes widened in surprise.

In that little gap, I definitely felt the pressure coming from O'brien-san increase. His body, his whole presence, felt like it grew in size. I could only look as the aged knight raised his long sword. The next moment, my body moved faster than my mind could think and I somehow took on that attack

with my sword. Blown away from the impact, I rolled away on the ground.

Unable to even understand how ragged my breathing had gotten, I just gazed at the sky while lying on the ground. I couldn't feel the sword in my hand anymore. My hand's gone completely numb. All the joints of my body, and my throat for breathing too much, hurt a lot.

"Let's end here for today. After dinner, come to the library." (ob)

"Ye-s."

As I answered that, Souichi came over and looked at me with a worried face.

"Are, are you alright?"

"Hm.....yeah..sorry about that."

"No, you don't have to..."

Souichi, being small and child faced, looked more like a girl. Maybe because his sister, Yayoi-chan, was more mature, those two looked like twins. If I said that, he'd start sulking but, oh well. Somehow, I can't stop myself from teasing him. Also, the way he acts as well.....

For example, right now, as I apologised, he gave an embarrassed expression. It really messes with my mind. Having lost in front of him, I stood back up.

After I stood up, next the soldiers came to me one by one to

appreciate my effort. For some reason, rather than towards Souichi and others who held insane powers, these soldiers seemed to have generated an affinity towards me who was beaten around by O'brien-san. How weird. Well, it's better than them being not fond of me, I guess. If they said something like me being so weak even though I was supposedly summoned to save the world, I'll probably won't recover from the damage.

As I walked while thinking of such things, I went and drank the warm water from the water jug kept near the field. At some point, Souichi had gone back and was swinging around his sword at the centre of the field. He didn't really have a form or a stance but due to his overpowered strength, the force waves from the sword alone seemed like they could cut things apart. How envious, seriously. Since I don't have the abilities like others have, I have no choice but to learn how to use a sword normally. Realizing that I was feeling jealous of a boy much younger than me, I shook my head. Taking another gulp of water. Really tasty. It felt so nice that I drank a bit too much and ended up spilling some water from my mouth and it wet my clothes a bit. But that felt nice as well. Due to the heat from my wounds and overworking my body, even this warm water felt nice and cold.

“Ah.”

“Hm.”

When I turned around at that voice, a girl with semi-long hair, pleated skirt and a white blouse with a blazer was

standing there. It looks like the middle school uniform from our original world. At her side was another girl with black hair. She was Souichi's sister, Yayoi-chan. She was dressed in more medieval clothes like we have seen in movies and stuff. And the girl in the uniform was Yayoi-chan and Souichi's childhood friend Fuyou-san.

Feeling her cold gaze, I scratched my cheeks.

"You're wounded so much again...."

"ugh.."

"Please leave the fighting to us Yamada-san. I really think it'd be better if you stayed here at the castle along with Toudou-san and Yui."(aya)

When she said that with a sigh, I ended up averting my eyes feeling pathetic. It's just as she said. Just like this girl, 10 years younger than me, said, I'm not suited to fighting. Let alone Souichi and others who got extremely combat related gifts from the goddess, I'm certain that I cannot win against even this magician girl. It was really pathetic, yet I had no retort.

I wonder what she thought of me, or maybe she lost interest.

"Well then, please excuse me."(aya)

Giving a bow, Fuyou-san walked away straight towards Souichi. In her stead, Yayoi-chan pointed her palm towards my left arm. Just as I felt warmth, my fatigue and pain began

to disappear.

“This really is convenient. Magic and miracles. It really is a fantasy world eh?”(renji)

“fufu, you’re saying the same things as Inoue-san.”(yayoi)

While shaking my now recovered arm, Yayoi-chan laughed.

As expected, it’s better when they’re laughing like this. I don’t really hate frank people like Fuyou-san but, I’m simply bad at dealing with them. Also, I’ve yet to see her smile even once. How should I say this, she’s always acting so strong. I think, that girl lacks the composure right now as well.

“Please don’t hate Aya-chan.”(yayoi)

“Un?”

“Well, she’s really severe when talking with people she doesn’t know too well you see?”

“Ahh.....well, I don’t really mind it.”

“That’s fine then.”

No, but well, yeah..

Fuyou-san herself was currently talking with Souichi and Hiyuu-san who was also training.

“Aya-chan’s worrying for you in her own way. So that everyone can return home safe and alive.”

“I know. Yayoi-chan, you’re really kind, aren’t you.”

“fufu, well then, if you’ll excuse me.”

Saying that, she walked away towards Souichi as well. The Brave sure is amazing. Even though I am so alone, he's surrounded by 3 beauties. One of them is her sister though.

While gazing at the sky, I gave a sigh. I need a weapon. A weapon to kill gods. So that I don't become a burden. Even if I'm unable to fully protect them, I at least want to fight alongside the kids.

Oh Goddess. You still have not fulfilled my wish.

As I looked at Souichi, surrounded by soldiers, a sad feeling lingered in my chest. Shaking my head, I gave a deep sigh, and let go of that thought with a wry smile.

———I want to become a hero as well.

Just then, feeling a bit curious, I took out the medal given to me by the Goddess. A golden medal. Except for the embedded gems, there was nothing too peculiar about it. That goddess said that it was a weapon to kill gods. This simple looking medal. Am I supposed to buy some great weapon by selling this? I can't understand it at all. Yesterday, even Utano-san told me that maybe it was a failure.

.

.

.

(T/N: back to present)

“Puhahahaha—th,this doesn't suit you at all!”

“What are you laughing so hard at, you fly!”

“Who did you call a fly!?!”

[.....noisy.]

As I tried to comb down my hair with gel, the girl lying on my bed started laughing at me. Does this not suit me that much? Even though I was just cursing outside, in my heart, I grew worried. The number of things you could use to groom yourself in this world could be counted on your hands. I am somewhat aware of those, but in the end, it's just half assed knowledge. Rather than this, it would have been easier to just have worn some fancy armour like when I met the King. At least, all I had to do then was just put it on.

The girl on my bed—a fairy with doll like features, Anastasia, was rolling while laughing not minding that her dress was getting crumpled as she did that. At times, a white cloth could be seen underneath that dress as she rolled around as well. That said, I'm not that big of pervert to lust after a doll like small creature. Paying it no heed, I restarted trying to fix my hair. Going by what I see on the mirror, it shouldn't be that bad but being laughed at so much has made me uneasy. I guess that's how human mind works.

As I put on the neat dress shirt and set the black necktie, I felt like a salaryman working in some corporate company. Remembering the old days, I felt a bit nostalgic but really, this doesn't suit me. Not like Anastasia, but I gave a short laugh as well. That's probably because after coming to this



world, I have spent most of the time in travelling clothes.

“Ermenhilde, what do you think?”

[Well, it’s fine I guess? The problem is clothes. Do you have any remaining?]

“From what I looked, yeah. Though, I’m not sure if they’ll fit me anymore.....”

Since my room was the same as a year ago, the clothes prepared for me and the arrangement of the furniture, all had been kept the same. Among those, there were many high class clothes made of quality fabric as well. But the problem was that they were prepared for me 3 years ago. I doubt that my height has changed much but due to the muscles I’ve gained, my body size has almost grown by 1 size. I wonder if I could still somehow fit in those clothes.

Somehow, I still remembered how to tie a necktie and surprising even myself, I was able to wear it properly. All said and done, I guess you don’t forget things you’ve learnt even once.

“Eeh, how skilled.”(ana)

“I’ve learnt it after all.”(renji)

“How unusual.”

[Well, Renji doesn’t really care for appearances and stuff like that normally, after all.]

“Umu.”

“Don’t say that proudly. It’s not cool.”(ana)

Anastasia seemed to be the type that minded personal grooming as well but it was completely useless right now as all she did was laugh or sigh at me. What rude queen. Whenever I recall that she’s the top of all fairies, I become really worried for the future of the fairy race.

Well, the rest of the fairies aren’t really different from Anastasia and have having fun as their first priority.

“But still, what’s up today? It really doesn’t suit you at all though.”(ana)

“I’m going for a dinner with Aya tonight.”(renji)

[For that, I need to force the meaning of ‘appearance and grooming’ into his head. You’re being a nuisance so return already, you insect.]

“Who’s an insect, you medal woman!? .....wait a sec.”

What’s with that surprised voice? When I looked towards the bed, the fairy who had been laughing like crazy till now stood up very docilely. It’s probably not my imagination that her expression looks angry. Maybe due to her height, she glared at me while looking up at me. It’s not scary at all though.

“Why did you not invite me!?”(ana)

“Why would I? Idiot. ”

If I did, I can only imagine what Aya would say, or rather,

what she'd do to me.

She didn't say it upfront but, I'm sure she's expecting to go to dinner alone, just the two of us. And if I were to go against her expectations———my body is well aware what she'd do much to my own displeasure. No, even I won't be able to laugh it away like usual. Yeah, I can't be acting like a child always after all. I'm 28 already. My heart's still young but I'm at an age where I'm expected to read the mood properly.

But, Anastasia seemed like she really wanted to go to dinner with me as she was pouting right now. Is that supposed to be an objection from her? Leave me alone.

“So it's Aya this time.....”(ana)

“What do you mean ‘this time’?”(renji)

Please don't talk like I'm going after lots of girls. I looked at her with a fed up face as Anastasia bit her finger while making a serious face. Just what do you see me as? Or rather, what kind of character does everyone think I have? Just a while ago, even Kuuki called me out about my relationship with wome, it'll make me cry you know? Well, not really though.

But even that aside, even Utano-san seemed to be stricter than usual about the case with Solnea. How should I persuade her? The easiest way would be to let them meet tomorrow and end it once and for all. I really want to be rid of all these false accusations. Well, I do believe that Solnea is a beauty but that doesn't mean I'll start lusting after her.

That's not my personality. If I did, I'm sure one day, someone somewhere would end up getting hurt. Even the idiot me understands that. Not to mention I've still not resolved my feelings about Eru either, and then there's Utano-san and Aya as well.

Harems are great, I really think that. Only when I'm not the main related/concerned person to it.

"I've had enough! After defeating the Demon God you hid yourself, finally when we meet here at the capital you won't play with me much and you don't even invite me to dinner now. Aren't you being a bit too cold?"(ana)

"Well, it's tiring to spend time with you after all."(renji)

"You're being way too rude now."(ana)

[Seriously.]

"You're not faring any better than me, medal woman."(ana)

[No such thing. I'm Renji's partner after all.]

No wait, you. Even though you'd always get irritated when I called you my partner, why do say it so happily only at such times?

Am I the only one feeling very complicated right now? I'm glad yet can't actually feel happy about it. Ermenhilde didn't seem to understand my inner thoughts though. If I had a way to look at her expression, she must be making a triumphant expression right now.

“Stop fighting, both of you. You’ll get scolded by Yui-chan.”(renji)

[Muu.]

“ugh..”

I sighed seeing them both get quiet just by mentioning Yui-chan’s name. It’s amazing how they can’t win against a child. They know that Yui-chan will get sad if they fight after all; these two really are honest at heart. Well, I’m not any different though.

“It’s unfair to use Yui’s name, Renji.”(ana)

[Yeah, that’s right. It’s not fair.]

“Why are you getting along now all of sudden?”(renji)

“We are not! Right, medal woman?”

[Exactly, you insect.]

Seriously, what the hell. While chatting with Anastasia who had already forgotten her earlier anger, I opened the wooden closet to choose some clothes. It seemed to be made of some fine quality wood as it seemed really sturdy yet was actually pretty light in weight. It took almost no effort to open the double doors. Taking out a few sets of clothes from it, I shut it back up.

Tonight we’re heading towards Toudou’s restaurant, a well-hidden yet really popular place. You’d think it’d be no problem seeing as one of the 13 heroes owns the place but

due to its special location, it wasn't normally popular. After all, it's located in one of the back alleys with complicated structures.

On top of that, he didn't even try to advertise the place even once. Honestly, even Utano-san said that he didn't seem to be actually interested in doing it as actual business. By the way, I couldn't find the place by myself either and had to ask Utano-san to show me the location on a map of the capital. That's how well hidden it is.

“Sometime later, I'll take you out as well okay? So let me go for today.”(renji)

“Really?”(ana)

“Probably. If I felt like it, someday.”

“So basically you won't will you!?”

While racking my brains on deciding which clothes to choose, I lightly spoke that to Anastasia. Obviously, even my purse isn't thick enough to take anybody out for dinner even when I don't feel like it. While ignoring Anastasia's voice of protest, I tried some of the shirts on me. Since it's been almost two years from when these were made, as you'd expect, they were tight. This is troublesome; I scratched my head while looking at the mirror. It'd be difficult to arrange for a new set of clothes before the night as well now. I guess the only way left is to go to a shop and get some readymade clothes. While checking if I had enough money, I planned for tonight.

Seemingly not happy from my response, Anastasia rose up from the bed. As she seemed to be using the power of wind spirits, her skirt fluttered around, making her thin, white yet nice thighs visible. Seriously, it's way too tempting to my eyes.

"I'll buy a grilled orc meat stick for you from some stall while returning, okay?"

"Just die!"

What violent is things this tiny is saying. Only her looks are cute, I'm sure she'd popular with men with weird fetishes. Like Koutarou, maybe Koutarou, oh and also Koutarou. He acts like a chunni but deep inside he's like that. While I was thinking of such things, my room's door was knocked on. And after a moment of gap, the door was opened and Yui-chan peeked inside. Behind her was the black armoured phantom knight, KNIGHT. Did they come looking for Anastasia?

"Oh, Yui."(ana)

"Excuse me, Renji-san."(yui)

"Yo, what's up yui-chan? If you were looking or Anastasia, take her back with you. She keeps on quarrelling with Ermenhilde, it's irritating."(renji)

"Wait, what are you saying so suddenly!?"(ana)

Anastasia raised a shout at the same time as KNIGHT closed the door behind him. Yui-cahn, with a sad expression,

came closer to Anastasia floating near the bed.

How should I say this, though I am the one who incited this, even I'm feeling bad now a bit. Seeing Yui-chan like that, Anastasia lost her confident expression that she has when talking to me and Ermenhilde and was looking around nervously. At times she'd look at me, but I can't help her. Just give up.

And as KNIGHT walked behind Yui-chan like a shadow maintaining the exact same distance, it looked really surreal.

“.....Ana?”(yui)

“It, it's not like that.....wasn't a fight. It wasn't a fight, right Renji? It wasn't, right!?”

Ignoring her pleas for help, I continued trying out other clothes. As expected all of them seem a bit small.....but not like I can't wear them at all. This one should work fine, I think?

Yui-chan silently reproached Anastasia and Anastasia constantly kept on asking for some help. KNIGHT kept silent as usual and simply stood behind Yui-chan indicating that he was clearly on Yui-chan's side. Ermenhilde and Anastasia alone made the room feel really lively already, but now it felt even more so as I gave a wry smile. I guess the proverb that it gets noisy whenever women gather isn't that wrong either.

“Say, Yui-chan look here for a sec, which one do you think suits me more?”(renji)



Collecting the clothes that I could wear, I asked Yui-chan for her opinion. Having been freed from Yui-chan's gaze, Anastasia also breathed a sigh in relief. Why is she so weak only to Yui-chan? Well, I guess anyone would feel guilty on being scolded by a child.

While listening to Yui-chan and Ermenhilde's opinion, I began to choose my clothes as Anastasia, probably out of boredom, flopped down back onto the bed. Since Yui-chan was here, she seemed to be paying mind to not ruin her dress this time.

"Say, Renji." (ana)

"What?"

"Is a date with Aya, fun?"

"Well, putting the fact whether can this be even called an actual date aside, yeah, it's fun."

"It is definitely a date. You're going on dinner together right?"

"Before that, where the hell did you even learn what 'date' meant?"

"Just now, from Yui."

I asked that solely to avert the topic but I was a bit surprised by the unexpected name that came from her. Yui-chan didn't seem to mind it much either it seems. No well, she's also 16 now I guess. It's normal for her to be expected in such things. Should I be happy at her growth or should be

worried about it? Anyway, I want to know if there is someone she likes.

When I looked towards Yui-chan, she wasn't there anymore. When did she move? She was currently pushing down Anastasia down on the bed with a red face. Probably trying to shut her mouth but since Yui-chan isn't exactly the physically fit type, it only looked like both of them had fallen onto each other on the bed. And on top of it, both of them wore skirts so it was pretty dangerous. Giving a cough, I averted my gaze towards the window instead but the silent pressure coming from KNIGHT and Ermenhilde was way too incredible. If it was weak hearted person, he would have gotten a seizure.

Inside this, well not really a scene of 'carnage' (shuraba), I simply gazed out of the window.

"It's good that everyone's so lively, yup."(renji)

[Where were you looking? What were you looking? Hm??]

OI, KNIGHT-san, please don't stand beside me while realising such intense pressure will you? Also Ermenhilde, if I looked at Yui-chan and Anastasia in that way, I won't forgive myself first and foremost, so be at ease. Stay calm.

.

.

But still, I thought.

"Is something the matter, Renji-san?"(aya)

“No, it’s nothing.”

Wearing a tight deep blue dress and a thick shawl made of monster fur, Aya looked up towards me and talked. I should try not to get too worried of the fact that we were at a distance where our elbows basically touching each other. Normally Ermenhilde who couldn’t read the mood would speak something random just about now but currently she had been left with Utano-san for safekeeping so it was really quiet.

It was night time. As I walked along the main street, now having much less people than normal, I recalled the way to Toudou’s in my head.

“Aren’t you cold?”(renji)

“fufu, no, I’m fine.”(aya)

Saying that, Aya leaned slightly more closer towards me. While acting like I didn’t notice, I scratched my cheek with my other arm. She’s in a really good mood. If I said that out loud, I wonder what she’d say. I became a bit curious but decided against asking that and slowed my walking speed a bit.

Aya felt more taller today than usual, probably because of those high heel like shoes she’s wearing. Her untied hair swayed in the wind and shined in the faint light of the magic street lamps. Her light make up suited her much more as she was always a bit more mature than her peers.

While stealing glances of Aya’s happy face enjoying the

coldness, I began to follow her swaying hair before I knew. 18 yrs old. Right between a girl and an adult woman, should I say. She's really grown, or rather, has become really pretty. I wonder if this is how a dad seeing her daughter grow up feels like. I changed my mood while thinking of such stupid things.

“Maybe we should have hired a carriage or something.”(renji)

“Don't worry about it. Also, do you even have that much surplus money on you?”(aya)

“Muu.”

“And anyway, isn't it more fun to walk and talk like this?”

Being told that much, I had no way to refute it. I also think that it's not bad to chat while walking like this. As we passed through various passerbys, we finally reached the landmark item shop I had been told. The alley turning inside from here is where Toudou's restaurant is located. Aya also knew the place as she lightly pulled my sleeve to tell where we need to go.

It tickled a bit. I quickly hid my smile with my other hand as we entered the alley. It seemed pretty clean for a back alley and didn't really feel dirty. But as expected, there were a lot less pedestrians. Expect for us, only a few more couples seemed to be walking here.

“As expected, there really are not many people here, eh?”(renji)

“True. The fact that even then Toudou-san’s restaurant became popular only shows how amazing he is at cooking.”

“yeah. That said, why did he open his restaurant in such a place though?”

Considering it’s him we’re talking about, his reason would be something like, he just wants someone to enjoy his food. The number of customers is the lesser the better.

Toudou Hiiragi. One of our comrades, and a cook. A weirdo who asked for a cooking related skill even after coming to a fantasy world. A former NEET(shut-in), and sucks at social interactions. Can’t converse properly, and keeps his thoughts to himself. But still, he put in great effort to walk with us, and travel along with all of us.

As I recalled his appearance from an year ago, we finally saw our destination.

“Finally.....”

“Huh?”(aya)

“I looked for the place many times after coming to the capital but never found it.”

Also, there was the matter of my debt to Utano-san so I put more priority/effort at earning money rather than look for Toudou’s place as well.

While thinking that, I looked at the place. It’s outer appearance was basically a stone building on a wooden frame. It seems pretty well built. Even the parts that were

supposedly damaged when he bought the place have been properly reinforced. When I tried touching, I felt something that didn't exist in this world. Is this concrete?

When I looked at Aya, she gave a vague smile. It must be Kudou who prepared this. I don't know how she prepared things like cement etc but her ability is [item creation]. She must have made it with that. Well, there was that one time where she made bombs out stones lying on the road during our journey so I'm not really surprised by anything she does. I can only say 'oh, cool.' That's it.

The name of the restaurant was [Bird of Happiness]. Since the building itself felt more like a house, the board seemed oddly out of place.

"Seems like a nice place." (renji)

"Yes. I have come here a few times before as well. It has a great atmosphere."

"Sounds great."

As I entered the place, the gazes of the people inside moved towards us. But their number wasn't big at all. Going by a glance, only 10 customers and 2 employees seemed to be there. Probably one more employee should be in the kitchen. The entrance to the kitchen was in a blind spot so I couldn't confirm it. Probably, Toudou's there as well. The place had two floors and I could see the stairs leading to the upper floor. Since the restaurant itself doesn't seem to be too busy, the second floor is probably Toudou's living room.

With a greeting, the attendant led us to our seats. By the way, the employees were in maid outfits. They even had a frilled headband which really suited them. As expected, he's a man with taste as well.

Just when I was thinking of such things, Aya pinched the back of my hand. Her smile was more scarier than the pain, so I quickly walked to our given tables.

"Seeing as he has hired employees, I guess he's still making profit."(renji)

"That's true. He didn't do much advertising but the place got popular from word of mouth it seems."

Saying that, Aya handed over the menu card to me. That said, the number of dishes weren't that many.

Since this world didn't have the concept of home delivery, there was no easy way to procure ingredients so I guess, it can't be helped really. Since we're in the capital, it would be easier than being in some village but still, getting things cheap would be really difficult. But still, to have a full salad on the menu, does he have some connection with a farmer family? As for meat, Orc meat.....well that's not too difficult to get.

The rest were noodle/wheat-based type of dishes you'd never normally see in this world. Taking a glance at others, everyone seemed to be eating those as well.

"I guess dishes from our world are a rarity in this world, eh?"(renji)

“Pretty much. You can only eat such things here which is why this place got popular with connoisseurs. It’s not gotten that popular though. Dishes we can get in the castle don’t appear here either after all.”

“Well obviously.”

Well, it’d be great if it did though. As expected, it’s not easy to make a dish from another world get popular that easily. After all, things like basic ingredients etc. all are different in this world. I recall him saying something like having difficulties finding substitutes for certain things. Also, the different peculiar ways to cook things is also an obstacle. I’m not an expert but if I recall correctly, to make udon, you need wheat flour, water and salt, right?

While trying to recall the recipe that I’m pretty sure is wrong, I decided on the order. Of course, it’s wheat based type. I order Tsukimi Udon and salad and Aya ordered Carbonara pasta. Hmm but well, I wonder if its weird to order something like Udon on a date but, I really want to eat that. I wonder if Toudou would make this himself?

“Is that much enough?”(renji)

“Yes. I don’t eat that much anyway.”

“If you’re worried about my financial health, you don’t have to okay?”

“.....you sound like a father, Renji-san.”

“Now, I’m not that old.....probably. At least keep me at



‘brother’.”

“fufu. But that’s the kind of presence you have. Even Souichi sees you like that, you know.”

But being a father is really.. The person who said such a troublesome thing was laughing while seeing my reaction. Even her usual cute gesture seemed more mature just because she had kept her hair loose.

Realizing my gaze, as if trying to hide her smile, she looked down to avert her gaze. Underneath the faint light of the magic lamps, I smiled seeing Aya cutely shrink herself like that to hide her embarrassment.

“Somehow, it really feels nostalgic.”(renji)

“Eh?”

At my words, her face rose back up.

“Back when we had just come to this world, like, we didn’t really talk much, did we?”(renji)

“We, well that’s.....”

“Back then, even during dinners like this, I only talked to Souichi and Yayoi-chan.”

“uu..”

How should I say this, but the early Aya was shy, or rather, always built a wall between herself and others I think. I know she had complicated family circumstances, and have heard about it in detail. So I can understand why she was that way,

and that's exactly why now I can talk to her like this about it.

Aya herself was blushing recalling her own past personality.

“.....Renji-san has changed as well.”(aya)

“Really?”

“Yes.”

When she said that, I felt a bit sad in different ways. Averting my gaze to look outside the window, I gave a deep sigh.

“The me back then, what was I like?”(renji)

“Eh?”

“Aya, how did—”

At that, I stopped my own words. How should I ask her? I couldn't think of a way. It's way to embarrassing to ask how she came to like me. And before that, how can I act that presumptuous? If I was a woman, I'd never want to even want to hang around with such an old man.

That said, I couldn't come up with better words. Still stuck, Aya waited for me to continue.

“——back then, from when we were travelling, have I changed?”

In the end, I went with a safe question. While sighing at myself, I turned my gaze back to Aya. Her clear eyes were looking directly at me. As our gazes connected, I felt like I'd

get overpowered by her strong eyes.

“Yes.”(aya)

Still looking at me with those strong eyes, she nodded.

“The Renji-san back then was, much more cooler.”(aya)

“Cool, is it?”

What a vague word. I can't tell how I have changed from back then but it seems I am not as cool as I was before. Well, I can't deny it either. I'm still stuck with my past. But—

“I see.”(renji)

“fufu.”

This girl's eyes, the woman who always supported me, the comrades who thought of me as a leader,—I don't want to betray them. I want to protect them. The movement among the demons, Solnea's existence, the absence of the Demon God. Through these various signals, I'm sure the world is going to start moving again. At that time, I'll have to fight alongside Ermenhilde once again. No matter how much I hate fighting, I can't run away from it.

At that time, just like that time—just like how I sacrificed Eru to kill the Demon God, to never lose anyone ever again. I need to resolve myself to step forward once again.

“Well, it seems I'm not cool at all right now.”(renji)

“Not really. Even now, Renji-san is still pretty cool though?”(aya)

“Be honest, you don’t have to force yourself to say it, you know? Look, your face is all red.”

“.....mouu, you’re supposed to ignore such things!”

While seeing Aya pout, I laughed. Even though she’s dressed so maturely, her expressions are still childish. I guess her true appearance is that of one with childish expressions maybe. As I thought of that, she looked at me with a full wide smile.

As we kept on talking like that, our order came and was arranged on the table. The steaming Udon stimulated my hunger further. Aya’s carbonara looks delicious as well.

“I’ll work hard as well.”(renji)

“Huh?”

“Nothing. Let’s eat.”

I slurped my Udon. Aya seemed to be wanting for me to say it again but, yeah whatever, this Udon is really delicious. As expected of Toudou, he has the greatest job ever. While thinking of things like a gourmet reporter, I gave a quick glance towards Aya.

Did she give up seeing that I’m not going to repeat it again, right now she was focused at the carbonara pasta she had ordered. Seeing her small gestures like holding her hair back slightly, I felt captivated. While looking at her, I thought.

———I couldn’t become a hero.

Then at least, I could move forward with confidence. Just like before. Like an year ago.

“The tournament.....”(renji)

“Yes?”

“No, well, I was thinking maybe I could try a bit harder in the fighting tournament as well.”

I doubt just trying alone would let me win but still, I might change a bit.

That alone would have enough meaning for me.

I'm not some Hero.

But even I, once admired those Heroes.

## Chapter 43: Fighting Tournament (2)

Noon, a few days after I had my dinner date with Aya. While chewing on the skewered Orc meat, I walked through the main street when Mururu, who was also eating the same, suddenly stopped. Wondering what happened, I also stopped only to see her ogling another food stand. Her tail shaking energetically underneath the cloak was cute but considering this had happened so many times already, I sighed.

“You’re still eating right now. At least wait till you’ve finished that.” (renji)

“.....please?” (mururu)

“No means no.”

When I clearly declared that, she started walking again with her animal ears drooping sadly. It’s a bit irritating that I am the one who feels so guilty when she does that but, I must harden my heart this time.

And Feirona was walking behind us while enjoying the scene with a smile. When I shot a glare at him, his smile only deepened. And at this expression from him, the women passing by us all seemed to be smitten instantly.....I think. Well, handsome people look attractive no matter what expression they make.

Beside Feirona, another beauty was walking, Solnea. Seeing her walking in the place where usually Ms Francesca would be felt a bit fresh. She had, rare to this world, long silky black

hair, pale white skin and somewhat lifeless ruby red eyes. She was wearing a black cloak similar to mine which was hung down from her shoulders. The thin cloth dress she wore emphasized her sensual body lines, especially her thin waist where a belt had been tightened.

Normally, seeing the handsome guy walk along with the magician girl felt really picturesque but seeing this shadowy beauty with him looks amazing as well. I feel like I'm the only one in this party that doesn't really have exceptional looks. I started feeling depressed just thinking about it.

[What happened, Renji?]

"Nothin--"

"I'm done eating!" (mururu)

"--that's way too fast. Chew properly at least."

"It's fine."

[.....Do you even know the meaning of that?]

I'm pretty sure, she doesn't. While I was pondering over my status in this party, Murur had finished her meat and looked up at me pleadingly. She really looked like a puppy waiting to get fed. She's a wolf though.....She must want more food I guess. Her gaze seemed to switch from me then to the stall after all.

"Have you forgotten what we're going to do next?" (renji)

"No problem. I can't move on empty stomach." (mururu)

“It’ll be fine if you didn’t move much as well, to be honest. Fine, this is the last time, okay?”

Like handing change to a child, I gave her a copper coin. Taking the coin, she literally skipped over to the stall at an incredible speed.

From hereon, the qualifiers for the fighting tournament will begin and Ms Francesca will be taking part in it. We decided yesterday to go and cheer her on. She seemed to be all fired up to take part but, let’s see how she fares in the battle. It’s very probable that she would fall in these preliminary rounds. So, this might be our only chance to cheer her like this, we decided to go today. I got scolded by Ermenhilde when I said that out loud though. Her quiet, calm voice of anger is pretty damn scary than a normal raging anger. Well, it’s not like I was serious when I said that. I don’t know what level students of magic academy are at but I do know the level of the adventurers and mercenaries that take part in it. I have taken part in this before as well, after all. The chance of her actually getting to take part in the battle is pretty low. She might get one chance through family connections though.

Feirona and Mururu didn’t seem to know about the tournament at all so I invited them since they seemed interested. Solnea didn’t really have any other place to go so I took her with me as well. As you’d expect, she had no interest in the tournament either.

“Are those really that tasty?”(sol)



While we were waiting for Mururu, Solnea came beside me and asked that. Her gaze was at Mururu—or rather, at the stall.

Mururu was currently getting a hot dog replica with bread, veggies and orc meat. Why doesn't she get fat even though she eats so much meat. Well, I guess she does move a lot with all the monster hunting we do.

“Yeah, it's pretty delicious. Want some too?”(renji)

“.....I can?”

“I don't mind. Getting one more won't hurt now.”

Saying that, I handed a copper coin to Solnea as well. By the way, the gold I had given her before had disappeared in buying clothes. Apparently, Ms Francesca didn't make any compromises in getting clothes for Solnea. In fact, I was told that one gold coin wasn't enough so she spent her own money for Solnea as well. As expected of a lady from a noble house I guess. Well, it's her own hard earned money, it doesn't matter how she decides to spend it. But it should be noted that both Feirona and Mururu were really tired by the end of it.

Taking the copper coin, she also headed towards the same stall as Mururu. As I saw her off, Feirona came beside me.

“Being a babysitter sure looks tough.”(elf)

[Seriously.]

“Why are you saying that?”(renji)

You did literally nothing. Only Feirona heard that Ermenhilde's voice other than me. I still don't trust Solnea enough and Mururu seems like she'd overreact everytime she hears Ermenhilde's voice. I can trust Feirona to act normally at all times. At Ermenhilde's voice, Feirona shrugged his shoulders and continued talking.

“So, got any idea of who or what she is?”(elf)

“None at all. I let her meet Utano-san as well but there was no abnormality she said .”(renji)

“If the Sage herself says so, it might be true.”

[Though I wonder if you can actually say that there are no abnormalities in a person who was literally living inside a crystal.]

Seriously. Last night, I took some time and introduced Solnea to Utano-san but didn't agin much info. She is a normal human, apparently. Even the crystal recovered from that cave was no different than normal crystal sold in cheap shops.

Well, it might be stupid to ponder over something you know nothing about I guess. With a sigh, I decided to cut that train of thoughts. I might start getting over suspicious towards Solnea and have a bad effect on her instead. I don't like such things. I should end it all within my thoughts. I'll deal with whatever happens, when it actually happens.

“For the time being, the only thing we know is that she doesn't have any magical energy inside her.”

“fumu.”

When I said that, Feirona went into thinking while resting his chin on her fingers. His every action makes him look good, really.

[So she’s basically the same as Renji, eh?]

“Pretty much. Well, I have you so I don’t really have much trouble though.”(renji)

[.....hmm.]

In my case, I just don’t have magical energy because I am not from this world in the first place. But.....What about Solnea? But there’s no need to worry about that now. Certainly, people with no magical energy are rare but it’s not like they are non-existent. Special people like that do get born every once in a while. And it’s not like they get discriminated against either. You can use convenient things like magic if you have magical energy but it’s not like everything requires it. As long as you can get education, you get a well paying job as well. Just like in our world. There are countless things a human can do without magical energy.

What is concerning is that the crystal she was sleeping in did have magical energy. And there was no answer to that question either. It was difficult to discern who she was with the info at hand. All I can do is take care of her as just a person I found in trouble. While I was thinking of that, Mururu and Solnea came back walking alongside each other while eating their hotdog replicas. It was not very well

mannered to do that so I could only sigh and give a wry smile. Black and white. Their colours were the opposite but they totally looked like sisters.

“It’s bad manners., seriously.”(renji)

“But it’s tasty.”(mururu)

“Well, great. I spent money on those so please relish them properly while eating at least.”

“I know.”

“I hope so.”

She remained expressionless as usual but her stuffed face looked really cute. The ketchup sticking on her mouth only added to her charm.

And just like the white girl, the black girl was also expressionlessly eating the hotdog. Since she was eating it nicely while taking small bites everytime, she looked more sweet than Mururu.

“Is it tasty?”(renji)

“Yes.”(sol)

When I asked that, she gave a short, concise reply. It’s really like her to do that.

“It’s good that you’re enjoying but let’s hurry now. We’ll miss Francesca’s turn otherwise.”(elf)

“Oh right, I almost forgot.”(renji)

“gulp let’s hurry then, Renji.”(mururu)

“.....you’re the reason we’re late, you know?”(renji)

As Feirona began to walk, we followed him as well. Walking between Mururu and Solnea felt like I had a flower in both hands but unfortunately, both of them were more concentrated on their food rather than me. Stomach before everything, I guess. It’s pretty sad in my position to be honest.

“Renji.”(mururu)

“Hm?”

“Can Fran clear the prelims?”

Whit a ketchup stained mouth, she asked me that.

If Fran—Ms Francesca would be able to clear through the prelims.

“Well, who knows.”(renji)

When I shrugged my shoulders, she frowned at me in a somewhat angry manner. Did she want to me to at least say that she’d pass, even if it was just words?

But, I can’t help that. I don’t even know who her opponent is, and neither do I know the skill level of the participants this year.

Though Ms Francesca has gotten used to fighting with monsters with her journeys, she’s still a bit naïve. I feel like that part of her personality will appear all the more so since

this time she's facing living humans rather than monsters. Monsters and humans are fundamentally different. I'm worried whether she'd be able to fire her magic against humans. Even Aya and Koutarou still hesitate in doing that. Utano-san doesn't hesitate but she does get depressed later on. Even I remember how bad I felt after the first time I cut down a man. Hurting others puts a lot of burden on you mentally. Can Ms Francesca handle that burden?

If she can.....she actually might pass the prelims.

“Well, the odds might turn in her favour today. We can't say who'll win for sure till we see the battle itself.”(renji)

“I see.”(mururu)

[How realistic. Wouldn't it be fine if you tried to be a bit more optimistic for her?"]

That's not what my character is like, and you know that. I simply shrugged my shoulders in answer to Ermenhilde.

Mururu's tail seemed to be drooping down and was sulking due to not getting the answer she was hoping for. Even though she was the one who asked the question in the first place.

It's easy to say that someone will win. But, it's Ms Francesca who actually has to work hard. It's not something I can say so easily like that.

While seeing her cute sulking face, I finally saw the huge building appear in front of us. And the main street felt like it

became populated and energetic as we got closer as well.

The Colosseum. The cylindrical building was tall enough that you had to raise your head to see the top and it was currently filled with people. Everyone has gathered here to see the fighting tournament. There are already more than hundred people here already. And the tournament hasn't even begun yet. The crowd will only get bigger and bigger.

Normally, the arena is a place where moneyless adventurers, mercenaries and young men proud of their skill put their lives on the line to fight here to earn money. They fight against humans, demi-humans, beastmen and even captured monsters here. The monsters only include low level ones like goblins, kobolds and Orcs though. And only, in one vs one battles. Though one vs many battles are very popular with the spectators. In this world that lacks ways of amusement, such dangerous things were the only way for them to feel excited. If you win, the reward is great, if you lose, you'd be badly injured. You might even die. That's the kind of place we were heading to. Well, what I gave was an extreme example though.

Normally, there are very rarely any people who fight till their deaths. Against humans, as long as you say 'I surrender!' the battle is over. And even if one doesn't do that, the referee would often declare the victor and it'll settle the match before there's a need to fight till death. Those who are ready to actually put their lives on the line and fight against monsters are a very small group of people who are very

desperate.

“So what do you think about this, Feirona?”(renji)

“I hope she wins, really. Francesca has been really working hard for this.”(elf)

I see. Am I the only one being too harsh?

While thinking of that, we joined the line of people as well. I could get a free pass for myself but I'll feel bad to let these guys wait in the line alone. As I looked around, I saw a lots of people just looking at those waiting to get an entrance to the arena. There were also a lot many stalls here than the main street as well.

“It's painful to not have you hardwork pay off.”

“.....Yeah.”

I felt a certain gentleness from Feirona's words. Did that come from personal experience? Or has he actually developed a sense of bond with Ms Francesca while travelling with her. In either case, this elf man seemed to be wishing for Ms Francesca's victory. And Mururu as well. These guys sure have started to get along with each other. Seeing their warm bonds, I gave a smile. Being aware of that, I hid my mouth with my right hand but the sharp sighted Elf just averted his gaze acting like he didn't see it. I wonder if he's happy or just embarrassed.

“Oh right, will you guys not enter?”(renji)

Remembering suddenly, I asked that. I know that both



Feirona and Mururu were much more skilled than normal adventurers. They might not win the whole thing but they'll probably go pretty far in the tournament.

But, while realizing my thoughts, Feirona shook his head. Mururu just continued eating her hotdog. This girl really prioritizes food over everything, doesn't she.

"I don't like standing out." (elf)

"Aah, I completely get what you mean." (renji)

[.....And why are you guys okay with that?]

Ermenhilde gave an exasperated sigh towards both of us. I am one thing but its rare for Feirona to get the same reaction as me from Ermenhilde.

"Renji won't be appearing?" (sol)

"Hm?"

The voice came from someone unexpected.

Solnea, who was eating just like Mururu, asked me that. I wasn't surprised, but it was a bit rare. I thought she didn't show any interest in such things. Well, then don't take her to a place like an arena. I feel like someone will tell me that. Whatever. I can't just lose sight of an amnesiac girl either, can i?

"It's already been decided that I'll be taking part. In the main matches on the second day though." (renji)

The tournament was divided into two days. On the first day

is team battles. And on the second day, it's one vs one tournament with the qualifiers from today's preliminaries and us summoned heroes included. At least, the weapons we have to use aren't holy swords or magci/demonic swords but rather, training swords with dull edges. Aya should have been limited in some way as well.

Just like Utano-san wanted, it'd be great if we could pull a lot of crowd to watch the show.

"I see."(sol)

"What, are you interested in things like this?"(renji)

"Meaning?"(sol)

"The tournament, the arena, fighting in general. Are you interested in such things?"

Saying that, I looked towards the entrance of the arena. Solnea also followed my gaze and look towards it. But, she remained silent. Getting no reply, after some time I looked back at Solnea only to see her staring at me. I still couldn't feel any wave of emotion from her. Her gaze still like in a daze. Actually, being constantly stared at like from so close that increased my heartbeat slightly.

"No, not really."(sol)

"I..see....."(renji)

Feeling a bit embarrassed from her straight gaze, I lost my words for a second. At that, Mururu who had been eating till now looked up towards me.

“Your face is red.”(Mururu)

“Just your imagination.”(renji)

“Kukuku, it’s a hot day for the end of the year eh?”(elf)

[.....Tch.]

You guys really do get along well. Is it that much fun to tease me? Goddamn it. Scratching my cheek that felt like it was gonna cramp, I averted my gaze. At that, Solnea simply looked at us in confusion. I guess she simply became slightly curious about the fights which is why she asked that. There was no other reason behind it probably. I simply overreacted seeing her say something like that, that’s all. And to her gaze as well.

For some reason, I’m not good at being looked at so directly. Is it because I lack confidence? Because I feel like they’d see through what kind of person Yamada Renji is?

“But, Renji, I’m interested in seeing you fight.”(sol)

“I see, I see. Well, I’ll try to work hard in my fight so be sure to enjoy it.”(renji)

That said, my opponent is Souichi. Trying hard alone won’t let me win but I don’t intend to give up before even starting. For starters, I’m gonna give it a shot at least.

[How unusual. I thought you’d be totally reluctant to do such things?]

I wonder what she thought of me as Ermenhilde spoke in a

somewhat surprised voice. Normally, at such moments, I'll usually say something pathetic and the Ermenhilde would scold me for it. That's how it had been.

Even I think that. I don't like standing out, and it's not like I'll use Ermenhilde in the tournament either. In a situation where the benefits from cheats to me are almost minimal, my strength is only slightly more than normal adventurers. Even if I fought Souichi while using training swords, there's a very low chance for me to win. Just like Ermenhilde said, I'll probably put in a little effort and then quickly lose and get it done with. At least, I wouldn't say something like I'll work hard.

[I see, I see. Good.]

What followed, was a truly happy voice from Ermenhilde. Normally when I hear that, I'd say something random at her and tease her but somehow, for some reason, I couldn't say anything. Because I knew what Ermenhilde was thinking very easily. She's simply genuinely happy that I decided to work hard. She has been telling that to me for so long after all. Seeing her so happy like that, I didn't feel like saying anything else at all. In a different sense from Solnea's gaze, I covered my mouth.

But this time, nobody seemed to have noticed my reaction. I looked at the crowd gathered in front of the arena with a daze. And Solnea looked at me continuously.

“What is it?”(renji)

“You’re an interesting person.”(sol)

Saying just that, she returned back to eating her hotdog replica. Unable to realize what she truly meant by that, I could only tilt my head in confusion.

[As usual, she’s a weird girl]

Seriously.

.

.

By the time, Mururu and Solnea finished eating their hotdogs and we had entered the arena, almost half of the spectator seats had already been filled. Sitting on the stone seats, Mururu and Solnea sat to my left and right. Feirona sat down on the other side of Solnea.

As I held on to the skewered orc meat in my hand, I recalled watching baseball matches like this back in my original world. Just then, Mururu, who was also eating the same thing moved her sights. On following her gaze, I saw Ms Francesca wearing her blue school uniform. She was currently standing at the entrance to the main stage. It must be her turn next.

“Fran, she’s there.”(mururu)

“So it seems. Aah, she really seems nervous.”(renji)

I could tell even from this far away that she was extremely nervous. She seems to have a sword as a weapon as she held

it, while inside the scabbard, tight to her chest. Moving my gaze, I looked at the two who were currently fighting in the arena right now. Maybe because the number of applicants was great, the selection process was being done through survival battle method. Around 10 or less participants will fight at the same time and only the last man standing would go to the next round. Except for the 2 fighting, there 5 other participants currently lying on the ground groaning in pain. At least they're not dead.

The skill level of the two currently fighting was.....not really high. No, maybe I've simply gotten a bit used to seeing higher level battles due to watching the training fight between Masaki-chan and Souichi. Compared to the adventurers of this world, these guys seem to have average skill. One of them was using a large sword, as tall his own height, and the other was using short swords skilfully in his both hands.

But seemingly uninterested in their fight, Mururu continued to be focused more on the meat in her hands. Is that fine with you?

“Don't overeat. We'll go for lunch with everyone later as well, you know?”(renji)

“No problem. I can eat that as well.”(mururu)

“.....You'll get fat.”

When I said that, she began to touch around her chest as if checking something.

[Maybe we should let her get fat for once?]

“That’d be troublesome on its own though.” (elf)

It was Feirona who answered to Ermenhilde’s suggestion. Certainly, for Mururu, who was the vital point of the vanguard of the party, to get fat would indeed be troublesome. Though I’m not sure if he was just joking or was actually serious. I gave laugh hearing him.

Not paying any attention to our conversation, Mururu continued patting her chest. I have heard that a girl’s chest grows bigger on massaging but that’s just a superstition. Utano-san had clearly verified that. I don’t know what she’d do to me if she heard that though. Solnea on the other side just was in some kind of daze, wondering about god knows what. As usual I guess.

The main arena was cylindrical in shape and surrounded by a stone wall. That stone wall had countless scratches and cuts marked on it. The ground had many parts still blasted out and there were even some broken weapons lying here and there. All of this was an indication of the intenseness of the [show] that takes place here.

It was at least 200m in diameter, I think. Pretty big, in my opinion. It closely resembles the colloseum we see in movies. At the very top of the spectator stands was place covered in high quality cloth. It was the place from where the royalty would sit and watch the arena. Right now, we were currently directly opposite to that area. The other spectators were

excitedly shouting and enjoying the fights in the arena right now.

The fighting tournament was the main event that takes place at the end of the year. The winner gets a reward of 5 silver coins, and other than that, if one gets acknowledged they might even get appointed as a Knight or a court magician as well. Not just that, it was also the best place to test your own strength. In this world that lack ways of amusement, there were many people who'd work hard all the year round just to take part in this tournament. In a way, it was considered an honor to just get to take part in this tournament.

“Will I also grow as much as Fran one day?”(mururu)

“It'd be great, if you do.”(renji)

“Yeah.”

I decided not to ask 'growth' of what exactly. That's my way of being kind. Unlike Ms Francesca, imagining a flat grassland, I said that. Soon, Mururu returned back to eating her meat. By the looks of it though, the one thing you'd grow right now is your stomach rather than chest. Well, considering the her body movement as a beastwoman, she probably won't gain much fat. In fact, I feel like I've never seen a fat beastman.

In the meantime, the battle in the arena seemed to be reaching its climax. The adventurer using two swords began to fight in a more aggressive state suddenly as the crowd



went wild with cheers. As if being powered up by those cheers, he dealt out a combo of attacks with actual skill and not just random movements. But the man with huge sword was blocking that combo very well.

“Who will win?”(sol)

“Hm?”

That question came from Solnea sitting beside me, still looking straight at the arena.

“Probably the one using the large sword.”(elf)

It was Feirona who answered. I also nodded at his unhesitating answer. The dual sword wielder had the momentum but the large sword user had more stability and solidness. He’s defending against the flurry of attacks with ease. Anyone with even slight experience could tell that it’s only a matter of time before the dual wielder runs out of stamina.

And as expected, the momentum of his attacks soon began to fall. But still, the large sword user didn’t take action. He must be aiming for the momentum when his opponent is completely out of stamina..... I guess he’s the type that lays importance on dealing attacks with max certainty. His way of thinking wasn’t wrong either as the moment the dual wielder stopped his attack, the large sword user blew him away along with his 2 swords in a single swing. As large roars of cheer rose, the man gave a bow and went back to through the gate having earned his pass to the next round. Seems like an

unsocial, or rather, boorish guy. Very manly indeed. Even his weapon is large sword.

“Looks like Feirona was correct.”

“Anyone could tell that. Didn’t you predict that as well, Renji?”

“Well, you can’t tell the result till the battle’s finished after all.”

“fumu, you’re not wrong, I guess.”

[The next one’s starting.]

At the same time, cheers rose again.

The fainted participants had been carried away by the staff personnel. At the same time, the next batch—Ms Francesca and others appeared.

“It’s starting.”(renji)

” n, I know.”(mururu)

Quickly finishing the food, Mururu’s gaze turned towards the arena. 7 participants. But only one will be the winner. The names of the participants began to be announced and the first one was Ms Francesca. The announcement echoed in the minds of the spectators directly through magic. I’m pretty used to it thanks to Ermenhilde but it still feels a bit weird to hear someone else’s voice directly inside your head.

Except Ms Francesca, everyone else seemed to be adventurers from either the capital or the Tactics City,

making everyone close combat type fighters. A magician like Ms Francesca actually might win it if she could position herself well and avoid direct battles.

“Can she win?”(sol)

“We’ll know soon enough.”(renji)

As I answered that, the participants started to spread over the arena. Maybe too nervous, Ms francesca was taking deep breaths. Adventurers used to fighting won’t overlook her like that. A troublesome magician, and since she’s nervous, she’d be the first one to get targeted. It’s easy to understand how their mind works even without being actually there on the battlefield.

Mururu seemed to be equally nervous but she kept looking at Ms Francesca without even blinking.

[So it begins.]

“Yeah.”

And the sound to begin the fight echoed. Even without the use of magic, it felt like the sound echoed all over the arena.

At the same time, all the participants began to take action. You’d think they’d go for the closest opponent but two of them went for Ms Francesca. At first, a baldy sword user and a dwarf axe-user attacked her from the front. She probably didn’t expect that to happen as her reaction seemed to be one step too late. It wasn’t normal for two contestants to team up like this, especially when they haven’t even met

beforehand.

But Ms Francesca had also gained a lot of experience since the first time we met. She was only surprised for a second, the very next instant she lightly kicked the ground and the baldy suddenly fell to the ground face front. It was a pitfall trap, a skill we were already used to seeing. She had created a small hole that wouldn't be noticed easily. Only big enough for someone to get his foot stuck in it and trip over. Since that man was holding his sword with both hands, he was unable to even recover from the fall quickly. Seeing the one beside him fall like that, the dwarf's movement also stopped for a second. The next instant, the dwarf was blown away by a invisible magic ball—an air ball. Next she hit the baldy, who was groaning in pain from hitting the ground with his face, with her short sword, while still in the sheath, into his stomach. Since there was no danger of cutting him, she hit him with all her strength and the man fainted. The dwarf, know to be one tough race, unsteadily stood up but another contestant used that chance to hit him in the head and knock him out. Ms Francesca wasn't the only opponent, showing an opening like that would result in loss.

Now only 4 remained. While Ms Francesca was dealing with those two, another one had been taken out. One magician, 2 swordsmen, and one using his barehands. Probably a martial arts user or a dark vessel user. Ms Francesca had the advantage in reach of attacks but I doubt the other 3 would give her such an opening. The deadlock

remained for a few ten seconds. The first one to move was one of the swordsmen. Using daggers in both hands, he faced the barehanded warrior. He swung a slash towards the enemy's flank but that man dodged it with minimal movement and struck the sword user's torso with his fist. Even though he was wearing leather armour, it seems like the attack was too strong as he dropped his daggers and fell to the ground.

“Only 3 remain.”

“Right.”

I nodded to Mururu's words. The fight's going in the right direction, I think. At first, when those two attacked together, I thought it'd be over but she did well to beat them. The announcement had introduced her as a student, but due to that first battle, others are now wary of her. In terms of fighting experience, Ms Francesca is nowhere near the other two. But the fact that she's still maintaining the pressure, not allowing the other 2 to team up against her, is because the first ambush on her failed. Also, they have yet to see the pitfall as well. This is a great advantage to her. Basic magic includes fire or air balls or rock and ice arrows. The pitfall magic isn't really included in the common sense of magic in the people of this world. At the most, the only info around would be that the Grand Magus and one of the heroes, Aya uses such a magic. Even after an year, I doubt many magicians have started using such a magic. At least I have not heard of any such magician. Then, that pitfall might

become her trump card.

The next one to move was Ms Francesca and the other swordsman. The man using longsword and leather shield faced the barehanded man. Ms Francesca used a chant-less ice ball and fired it at the bare handed man further helping the sword user. But maybe because he had incredible kinetic vision, or simply had too much experience, he easily dodged the sword swing and the fist sized ice ball. And after that, countered the sword user in the same way as before but ended up being the one falling down. He didn't fall flat on his face like the earlier one but this opening wouldn't be missed by the sword user. Since he was too close, he couldn't swing his sword so instead he used his shield to hit him straight and made him faint.

Now it was 1 vs 1. Without any gap, the sworduser ran towards Ms Francesca. It showed that he was experienced in fighting against magicians. Magicians use long range, heavy firepower spells to take down their enemies, or so is the common image of magicians in this world. The best way to not let them concentrate and use spells is to rush them and enter close combat. Magic could only be activated by concentrating and heightening your powers of imagination. Reversely speaking, you could completely seal a magician if you don't let them concentrate. It is a known fact.

A normal magician would here try to create space between them but Ms Francesca drew her short sword from the sheath. A light magical energy covered her limbs.

Enhancement of physical abilities. I was a bit surprised seeing her use this as a trump card since I had never seen her use this magic before.

“That’s the way.” (elf)

I heard Feirona speak that. It was Feirona who taught Ms Francesca how to use a sword. The short sword and longsword clashed, and though slightly awkwardly, she handled the attacks. At the same time, she seemed to be even aware of not tripping over the fallen down other participants. The way of using the sword, the way of moving in a battlefield. She remembers to concentrate even while moving well. She has been taught really well it seems.

And, Ms francesca also had magic to help her. Did she start getting used to the opponents attacks, or did her opponent start panicking and making crude movements, he was barely able to fend off her attacks. She slowly became even able to completely fend off his longsword’s attack without much trouble.

“Compared to a lizardman, his movements are too slow.”

“Well, obviously.”

I agreed with Mururu who compared him with a monster. Monsters have much more physical strength and stamina than humans. It’s not even worth comparing.

Certainly, if she could face a more powerful humanoid monster, it made her skills easier to understand. Magician and swordsman. A rear guard job and the vanguard job. But

even so, they were fighting on equal terms. Before I knew it, that newbie adventurer girl had already grown into such a competent adventurer.

After a few more exchange of attacks, the opponent began showing signs of exhaustion. On the other hand, Ms Francesca didn't show any signs either conceit or pride. There was not even a sway in the magical energy enveloping her showing that she still had plenty of magical energy left. Finally, seeing her opponent make a big swing again, she used the gap to create a hole beneath him and buried his foot till the ankle. His attack met only the ground and his open side of his face was hit by her short sword. That's gonna really hurt, yeah. The man rolled over the ground and twitched while laying there. Only his face had been hit but the impact of his body hitting the ground must have been hard as well. The blood coming from his nose shows how painful it must have been.

“fuu.”

“waah.”

It seemed even I had become nervous as I breathed out finally and heard the same kind of sigh of relief from beside me as well. Looking there, my gaze connected with Mururu's. And at the same time, the voice directly coming to our heads declared the winner as Ms Francesca.

“She won.”(mururu)

“Yeah. Looks like we'll need to celebrate.”



“Yeah.”

I smiled back seeing Mururu giving a rare wide smile as well. I felt my chest become warm seeing her expression.

Feirona didn't show much change in her expression but I know he's pretty happy as well. I wonder if he himself knows that the corners of his mouth are turned up much more than usual? Realizing my gaze, the handsome elf hid his mouth in a very casual manner. Since I'm always teased by him, I'll definitely tease him later to my heart's content. Definitely.

“She became victorious.”(sol)

But, only Solnea, like usual spoke that in a flat voice. I looked towards Ms Francesca once again. I'm guessing she is the most surprised with the result of her match. Even though she has been declared as a victor, she's still staring at the short sword in her hand with surprise.

I wonder what kind of emotions are going through her right now, what is she feeling right now?

I became a bit curious so I decided to ask her later during the celebration. Till the official asked her to leave the arena, she remained standing there in surprise.

## Chapter 44: Fighting Tournament (3)

I wonder if I am the only one feels good to see food slowly decrease from the numerous dishes arranged on the table. I looked at Mururu eating the Udon with a fork having left the difficult to use chopsticks aside. After a while, Mururu, who had been focused at her food only, realized my gaze and looked at me.

“.....What?”(mururu)

“Nothing, I was just thinking that you really can eat a lot.”(renji)

“It’s tasty.”

“Well, I’m glad. It was made by my friend so hearing that makes me happy as well.”

“I see.”

She gave a wide smile at that confusing me a bit. But, it’d be weird to think of such things and not eat, so I also moved my chopsticks towards my dish. My order had been Soba. Solnea had ordered the same dish as well, and was currently trying her best to use the chopsticks and eat it. If it’s that difficult, you could just use a fork like Mururu, you know? Well, I did actually tell her to use a fork but for some reason she seemed adamant to use the chopsticks only. I don’t why she became so obsessed with that but if she herself wants it that way, I think it’s fine. It’s a bit frustrating to watch though. The noodles will start to stretch so I hope she

doesn't take too long.

Ms Francesca and Feirona didn't seem to be much of the adventurous type in trying food as they still ordered a spaghetti type dish already common in this world. They were both, of course, using forks and eating as gracefully as possible. Seriously, these two look good no matter what they're doing. Solnea was.....well, seeing a beauty have trouble with eating food might have its own charm for being a bit surprising I guess?

Other than that, there were also deep fried and vegetable based dishes on the table as well. The first of them was, Sashimi? Fish type dishes were rare in this world, probably not more than river fishes being fried and eaten is all I can think of. The sea was the territory of monsters, so jobs like fishermen didn't even exist. Even in the Commercial Sciences City which is located at a coast, saltwater fishes are very rarely sold. They're not non-existent but the number and variety was simply too low. Thus, dishes based on fishes were sparse. In fact, there might be people inland that aren't even aware that even seas and the ocean have fishes of their own. And, to such people, a dish where you have to eat a fish basically raw is probably not their idea of 'fresh'. And true, only I, who ordered it, was eating the dish.

“But still, who would have thought that cuisine from another world would be so tasty.”(elf)

“The Sashimi is pretty as well, you know?”

“.....Is that supposed to be eaten raw?”

“Well, yeah. If we had wasabi to go with it, it would have been perfect though.”

“I don’t really get it but if you say so, whatever.”

Looks like he really has no intention of trying it. For Feirona who lived in the forest, marine eatables like this in itself would be rare. He didn’t even try out the fried ones made of minced fish meat either.

While giving a wry smile as I extended my chopsticks towards the sahsimi, Ms Francesca and SOlnea also extended theirs towards it.

“Oh.”

“What is it?”

“No, nothing.”

These two didn’t seem to show much disapproval towards the Sashimi. Maybe they’re just trying it out since I was eating it. Ms Francesca used her fork to cut it and Solnea clumsily, while shaking, used her chopstick to put some on her small plate.

“Where I lived, Sashimi is considered a high-class item you know?”(renji)

“Really?”(fran)

“Because eaten raw after all. Since the degree of freshness mattered greatly, various troublesome methods had to be

used to keep it fresh apparently.”

“Various methods?”(fran)

“Yup, various methods.”

Saying that, I quickly took a bite to cut the topic. I know I was the one started the topic but I am completely unaware of everything else about it myself. And also, it'd be difficult for them to understand even if I talked about my world. I'd rather not confuse them too much. That was a failure at starting a conversation. And, to be honest, for a high class item, I could quite easily get it even with my poor lifestyle.

Since Solnea had not been told of my circumstances as of yet, I felt that it'd be troublesome to speak of that in front of her. But even that won't last for that long. It's not like I'm going to have to take care of her forever either.

“But still, you sure performed great Miss Francesca.”(renji)

“Yes?”

“The prelims. To be honest, I didn't think you would be able to fight that well.”

“.....he even said that you'd lose, at first.”(mururu)

Please shut up, Mururu.

And sure enough, Ms Francesca's expression completely froze. I cleared my throat and took a sip from my tea.

“Congratulations. It could be that we'd end up fighting each other in the main tournament as well.”(renji)

“Eh?”

“No, well, I’m also taking part in the main battle so there’s a chance right?”

“Uu, ah.....really?”

“Well, kind of.”

“You’re such a bully, you know?” (elf)

I simply shrugged my shoulders at Feirona’s words. My opponent has been decided as Souichi already though. But I’m the only one who knows that. So I’m allowed to tease her a little, right? Maybe I’m just a bit sad that she grew up so much without me knowing.

And by the way, I truly am happy for her victory. As someone who knew what Ms Francesca was like back then, I’m really happy to see so much growth in her in the matter of few months.

“Even though when we first met, you were about to get killed by a few goblins..”(renji)

“You still remember that.....”

“I doubt I could forget that.”

As I laughed saying that, she hung her head in embarrassment. That gesture of hers alone hasn’t changed at all since we first met.

Trying to subjugate goblins even though she had no experience, got close to dying and then wailing and crying

afterwards. And that girl was now able enough to take part in the main rounds of the tournament. I don't know how far she'd be able to get but I hope she gives her most satisfactory performance.

“How was she back then?” (mururu)

“Well even though I say it like that, it was not that long ago. I know her since after I saved her from goblins that had attacked her.”(renji)

“Oh.”(elf)

“That was really dangerous, if I had not saved her in time, she really would have died right there.”(renji)

“Yes.....for that time, once again, thank you very much. If Renji-sama had not saved me who knows what would have happened.....”(fran)

“No, you don't have to so seriously thank me again now, you know...”

“No, if not for Renji-sama I would have never even fulfilled my dream of appearing the Fighting tournament's main round.”

I was just joking around when I spoke of that time you know? But it seems the fear she felt back then is still strongly rooted in Ms Francesca. Well, it's thanks to that she is able to give her best now without being reckless and putting herself in danger now though. Even after becoming able to fight monsters near the capital and even after entering the

main round of the fighting tournament, she has not gotten conceited yet. You could say that she's maturing in a very good way.

“Also, you should be thanking Feirona for helping you win rather than me.”(renji)

It feels weird to say this myself but, I did absolutely nothing that would have helped her win to be honest. At most, the only thing I've ever taught her is to use that pitfall magic back when we were facing those orcs. And a bit of common knowledge about being an adventurer and basic monsters, that's all.

I never even taught her how to swing a sword, let alone how to fight. That's why I think that saying something like 'if not for me' doesn't suit the situation.

“Both me and Mururu as well, only taught her how to always be cautious during battle. As for her sword use, she learnt simply by watching.”(elf)

“Sword.....you mean me?(renji)

“Umm, yes.”(fran)

Feirona uses his bow more than his sword, and Mururu uses her own body as a weapon. Thus, if Ms Francesca had learned sword fighting by just watching, it'd have to be me. Now I feel a bit embarrassed.

But still.....I recalled Ms Francesca's fight in the colloseum. How should I say this, I actually have zero confidence that I'd



be able to fight with as much splendour as she was. Even during her sword fight, she was able to use magic even during close combat. Though there was still roughness in her form, she still fought looking like a pretty good adventurer. With her appearance, I'm guessing she'd get really popular one day. As someone who's supposedly her model for sword fighting, I feel a bit sad or rather, pathetic instead.

I was, in fact, taught by O'brien-san as well but I don't use his sword style at all. His is an incredible one hit sure kill attack type whereas mine involves dealing fast, multiple weak attacks to deal damage. And Ms Francesca was an incredible sword that combined both sword skill and magic. None of us actually resemble each other's style at all.

“Did her style actually resemble mine?”(renji)

“Not at all.”(mururu)

To make sure I asked Mururu and she gave an instant reply. I agree as well.

“That's what I thought as well. My sword is--”(renji)

“Renji's sword is far more skilful.”(mururu)

—Not that splendorous. Before I could say that, Mururu cut my words.

“It's as Mururu-chan says.....”(fran)

“You do get a passing mark in my opinion. What do you think, O great master?”(elf)

“Who the hell are you calling aster? I don’t remember teaching the sword to anyone.”(renji)

“.....Uuu.”

As Ms Francesca gave a groan, Mururu glared at me. You both sure are on good terms. While feeling a bit envious, I thought about how to answer that.

Or rather, I felt that she was already pretty amazing. At least, compared to my own sword skill in the first three months of learning, I didn’t even know what a sword stance truly was, I just swung the sword around in desperation. And no matter how much I learnt to swing it, in an actual battle, I could barely put it to use. As someone who knows that, I can tell how much effort Ms Francesca must have put in her training. What passing mark, I can only think of complimenting her greatly.

“In the first place, I don’t feel that my sword is that skilful.”(renji)

“Really?”

“My sword is still very clumsy and awkward. I just learnt it by desperately swinging the sword while fighting much stronger monsters. Though I have been taught the basics, it was only for one month.”

Other than that, there were goblins, orcs, lizardmen, zombies, hawkmen, vampires and other humanoid enemies and also treants, Garm, golems, chimaeras, dragons and other much crazy existences. And after fighting those, trying

to keep myself alive, I kept on swinging my sword and finally turned into what I am right now. It can't be called skilful, it's still very clumsy. At least, I think so.

But apparently my comrades consider it to be skilled. Certainly, I have cut through countless enemies of various types with it but still, it feels a bit embarrassing to be told that.

[fufufu.]

“I don't think the word 'skilled' suits me much.”

As I said that while scratching my head, Ms Francesca and Mururu looked at me with a blank gaze. Feirona, seeing me troubled at their gazes, simply gave a smile. Only Solnea, looked at me with her usual expressionless face.

[You're being trusted a lot, eh?]

“Seriously.”

I lacked confidence even in the words I replied to Ermenhilde. True, I experienced an extremely dangerous journey of going and killing the Demon God and lived. I grew more than any adventurer possibly could I think. It's not a game or manga but fighting stronger people, experience from the journey, they're all one of my few strengths.

And it was the same as Ms Francesca. She experienced dangers and journeys, normal newbie adventurers would never get to take. A descendant of the Demon God, ambush from a Demon, the encounter in the forest of rotting souls. It

was enough experience to completely change someone.

“Well, I’m happy that you watched my sword.”(renji)

“Eh?”(fran)

“Really. You’ve grown so much from the time we met.”

“Mouu, please enough of that!”

Hahahaha. I didn’t want myself to be the only one getting all embarrassed so I decided to involve Ms Francesca as well. Recalling the Ms Francesca back then, and her crying face after almost dying to goblins, my heart felt lighter. Aah, this calms me.

[You’re really such a bully/mean guy.]

Isn’t that normal for me?

As I teased Ms Francesca while eating the Surimi (T/N: minced fish.) , Feirona and Mururu gave small laughs. Probably, they have already noticed my embarrassment as well. Am I that easy to understand?

“So, is the Surimi tasty?”(renji)

“It’s weird. It does get tasty as I continue to bite.”(mururu)

“haha, that’s certainly weird.”

It must be a new texture of food for her, as Mururu made a complex face while eating. When I laughed looking at her face, I got kicked beneath the table. The kick didn’t have any strength to it so it doesn’t hurt at all though.

[What the hell are you guys doing?]

“.....messing around?”(renji)

“What is it?”(mururu)

“It’s nothing.”

As I gave an answer to Erenhilde, Mururu reacted to it so I just gave a vague reply to it. Ms francesca happily looked at us, having this usual kind of conversation. Mururu must have realized that I was talking to Ermenhilde. Recently, her senses about it have gotten even sharper.

And in the end, the atmosphere remained as usual as we talked and laughed, rather than making it feel like an actual victory celebration, as we finished eating. Well, it was mostly Mururu who was eating though. Solnea seemed to be quite the big eater as well but was still no match for Mururu. That said, Solnea still ate many times more than Ms Francesca.

As we paid the bill and left the building, I shivered from the cold air in the empty alley. I should probably go and greet Toudou as well but I’d feel bad making others wait for me so I decided not to. Well, I can meet anytime I want later after all, so it’s fine.

“The main round of the tournament will start soon. Think you can win?”(elf)

“No way. That said, I do intend to actually make an effort this time.”(renji)

“Oh?

“Well, I’m not gonna win with just that though.”

The women had already started walking as me and Feirona walked behind them when he asked me that.

I have zero confidence for winning. I doubt I’d actually win against Souichi. But I am hoping to at least give him a bit of challenge.

If, my opponent in the first round wasn’t Souichi, I wonder how far I could go in the tournament. I wonder how close I could come to winning. I quickly shook my head. There’s no use thinking about that. The world wasn’t easy enough where you could win just by putting a little bit of effort. In the first place, that would be rude to those who genuinely are working hard for the tournament.

“Your face looks better.”(elf)

“It’s the same normal face as I always had though?”(renji)

“Don’t you think so as well?”(elf)

[That’s true. Not bad—it’s the face I like.]

At just that, my heartbeat rose instantly. To Ermenhilde it was just a trivial thing to say but that voice, and those words, it’s not fair.

I don’t think I let it show in my expression but my gaze swam away for a second. The sharp sighted elf walking beside me wasn’t going to miss that. He didn’t say anything but I could see his shoulders very slightly shake from stifled laughter. I gave a sideways glare at him but only got ignored.

Goddamnit!

[What happened?]

“Nothing at all.”

[??]

I answered in a rude way but I can't help it that I got embarrassed. I don't want anyone to see me like this.

“You're truly unusual, Renji.”(elf)

“.....in what way?”

Due to that, I replied to Feirona in a somewhat strong voice as well. But without paying any attention to that, Feirona continued.

“You're not like a hero at all.”(elf)

“Well, I'm not suited to be one after all.”

I gave a standard reply to him.

Hero.

I'm not suited to be one. I know that better than anyone else.

“To you, what is a true Hero like?”(elf)

“Well.....A hero is hope for everyone. They answer to the wishes and prayers of the people. Even in despair they look forward and for the world, for the people, for anyone, for the greater good, they give their best. And above all, you don't call yourself a hero, you're named one by others.”

“fumu. That is certainly one form of a hero.”

His reply was very light. He wasn't disregarding my opinion but wasn't accepting it either. That's how it felt.

“Then, in your opinion what's a hero like?”(renji)

“Someone who is trusted by all, and someone who can accept that trust.”

His straight gaze was so strong that I averted my eyes as if running away.

Trust.

Those were words far too heavy for me. Aya and the others put their trust on me. We travelled together, trusted each other, and thought well of me. Even I know that. And even now they trust me like before. And even though I find it heavy, I still get spoiled by them.

But still. But still I—above those people that came from my own world and were like family to me, I chose Eru above them all. I ended up choosing to protect my promise to her.

.

Even though Eru was no more.

.

“Feirona.....”

“You're making a good face right now, Renji.”

“.....”



I shut my mouth at those words. I wanted to ask, how? But I didn't.

Even though I chose Eru, I am trying to answer to Aya and everyone else's feelings.

It's all so confusing I feel like I'll go crazy.

"When we first met, I thought of you as a guy with no willpower and someone who hated trouble above all. But right now, you're looking ahead."(elf)

"If I don't, I'll fall over and injure myself after all."

I answered to him with light talk but he didn't seem to get angry.

"That's right, if you don't look ahead, you'll stumble and hurt yourself one day."(elf)

He simply said that back to me. In a very light and calm voice. It entered directly inside my chest.

Was choosing Eru an 'injury'?

Was my wish to Astraera a 'stumble'?

No. It wasn't. I shouted that inside my heart but couldn't say it out loud.

Aah, I don't know anymore.

"I said this in the afternoon as well. To see hard work not bear fruit is an extremely painful thing."(elf)

"Yeah, you did."

“Don’t let Francesca’s hard work/perseverance go to waste. It’s fine if you are not a Hero. It’s true that maybe you really aren’t suited to be a hero.”

Looking in front, I saw Miss Francesca and the others standing and waiting for us.

“But right now, you are that girl’s objective/goal. Not the world or anyone else’s, but at least answer her trust in you. I think you can bear at least one, right?”(elf)

This was, just like then——it’s similar to my choice when I killed the Demon God.

I chose only one.

Not the world, not my comrades, not everyone.....I chose Eru.

It wasn’t a mistake. True, I am still enjoying my life.

“.....Well, I...”(renji)

Looking ahead, I saw my current comrades.

I looked beside me, I saw a meddlesome comrade of mine.

I put my hand in my pocket. There was my partner who had now changed from back then.

“I’ll try my best.”(renji)

“And that’s fine.”(elf)

My answer was short, so was his reply.

That much is fine, right? Maybe I tend to overthink things

too much. I'm not sure though.

"Say, Feirona."(renji)

"What?"

"How old are you?"

"By human calculation.....around 150 maybe?"

"I see."

I guess from his point of view, I'm nothing more than a child. Just those words alone made my heart feel lighter.

"Say, Renji."(elf)

"What?"

"We don't expect you to act like a hero in front of us, okay?"

".....I see."

This guy actually might be an Esper as well.

I could only think of something like that to change my mood.

[.....]

Inside my pocket, I gently caressed Ermenhilde. But I received no reply.

# Chapter 45: That Sword

Aah, this is a dream.

While faced with the despairing tragedy in front of me, someone muttered that.

.

.

Haa haah, while breathing heavily, I ran through the stone corridor with all strength. I wanted to plug my ears to avoid the roars and screams coming at me from all directions but my right hand was supporting Souichi-kun, who I was carrying on my shoulders, and my left hand was pulling Hiyuu-chan as I ran, so both my hands were not free. Souichi-kun had lost consciousness and so felt very heavy. But this wasn't the time to be complaining. From behind, a monster, who felt like [death] itself, was chasing us. I ran past many soldiers who were rushing towards where we came from, towards the monster. Seeing as they didn't even have the time to notice us fully showed just how abnormal this situation was. Their iron armor that hit me as they passed in a rush really hurt.

O'brien-san and others said that they'd hold it back but I doubt they'd win against that monster. Even Souichi-kun, the strongest among us summoned 13, lost consciousness in few seconds. If O'brien-san and the others had not let us run, only the worst case scenario was waiting for us. And even

though O'brien-san is still at the training field fighting and holding back those monsters.....here I was pathetically running away along while pulling Hiyuu-chan with me. Even though we had been summoned exactly to help in such a situation.

No, so what if we have received some super strength, without experience it doesn't change one damn thing. No matter how incredible the power we get, we're still only amateurs. Our bodies froze just looking at some heavily injured people, and would faint if we saw a corpse.

“O, onii-chan!” (T/N: onii-chan is used by younger children to refer to older boys even when not actually family btw.)

Hiyuu-chan called me. But without even answering her, I ran desperately while pulling her small hand. Even though the sky visible from the windows was clear enough that it could blind you, why the hell did something like this had to happen? I wanted to just escape it all in front of this sudden calamity but I shook my head and tried to calm myself. No need to waste energy on thinking, just run! Run, as far as possible. If this goes on, we'll all be annihilated. I gripped Hiyuu-chan's hand tighter. At the very least, I have to save at least this small girl.

“It'll be fine. O'brien-san and the others will take care of something like that in no time, don't worry.” (renji)

“Uu, n.....”

I said that but Hiyuu-chan's expression remained poor. It's

only to be expected. If this goes on.....no, the castle is already doomed. Even a child can figure that out. That's how much the difference in abilities is.

The ones attacking the castle right now weren't those low class monsters like goblins or orcs that I had read in books. They were demons wearing incredible armor along with giant monsters. Among those, there were even giant chimaeras and golems that alone require tens of knights to defeat. But their numbers weren't just one or two either.

The surprise attack happened out of nowhere. I was just heading to the training field as usual to practice when the space distorted and monsters appeared out of nothingness. It'd be weird if we could deal with something like that. Souichi-kun who just happened to be with me tried to deal with them but only to end up carried away on my shoulders. No matter how strong of a divine protection of the goddess he had received, Souichi-kun was a middle school student till only a few days ago. There's no way he'd be able to deal with something like being suddenly surrounded by a vortex of death. As a result, I had no choice but to carry him and pull Hiyuu-chan and run away.

I wonder if Utano-san and the others are safe. I had no way of checking but I can atleast hope they are.

I wonder how far had I run away. Finding the giant door I had become familiar with, I quickly entered inside.

The cathedral. Normally the place was tranquil and

peaceful but right now it was filled with people. Injured soldiers and knights. Priests trying to heal as many as they could.

It was truly like the scene from a battlefield you only saw in movies. In front of such a scene, I could only stand in a daze. My body lacked strength. My mind didn't work. The smell of blood and cries of pain felt disgusting. This was reality, I just couldn't accept that.

But, there was a small hand that pulled mine.

“Are.....are you...okay?”

It was Hiyuu-chan. The one who brought me back to senses was this small girl with eyes filled with anxiety and unease.

Aah, that's right. I can't lose my calm right now. I am the one who's holding this girl's hand. How could I be the one being anxious instead?

“Hiyuu-chan, let's take some rest.”

Closing the great door, I spoke that to her. Handing over Souichi-kun to one of the Priests that came worried towards us as we entered, I headed deep inside with Hiyuu-chan. As I searched for a place to sit in the floor filled with towels, blankets, and medical tools and items, I my chest tighten.

Even though I was summoned to fight, I ran away like this. That fact struck me like a thorn. At the deepest part of the cathedral was the silver statue of the goddess and some of

the priests were praying to her. But she won't answer those prayers. She wasn't even in this world and simply watched over this world from a different place.....probably.

Near that statue, seeing an empty couch, I sat down. Hiyuu-chan sat down beside me as well. Since the longsword on back was an obstruction, I threw it on the ground making a clanking sound. Looking beside me, towards Hiyuu-chan, her white hair, typical to albinos, were sticking to her face from sweat and she was panting fast for breath. We ran so much that even I, an adult, was tired, I can only imagine how much stamina she must have consumed. Realizing that I didn't even think about her well being while running, I only felt more miserable.

“Are you....okay?”(yui)

“Yeah, you, Hiyuu-chan?”

“.....I'm alright...as well.”

Just from those small words, I felt my heart lighten a bit. But still, my head hurts thinking about what to do next.

So many monsters had invaded. It's clear that all of them must be subjugated. But, we lack the power to do so. People, strength, we're lacking in all of it. Even leaving me aside, the most essential in battle, i.e. Souichi-kun is currently unconscious. And we don't even know where everybody else is among this chaos and confusion. For people summoned to save this world, we are not being of use at all. In fact, we are the ones getting protected by the people of this world



instead.

And as we waste time, injured would increase in number, and so would the dead--

If this what everyday was like in this world, I'll break. Who even thought of this? We knew it was impossible for just some humans to save the world. Let alone fighting experience I hadn't even held a sword before coming to this world.

“Onii-chan.....what do we do?”

“Ah, yeah.....”

That's right, I don't have the time to be making excuses inside my mind. Both me and Hiyuu-chan have super abilities granted to us by the Goddess. Thinking of that, I brought out the medal kept inside my pocket. It's just a gold medal. It's designed differently from the gold coins used in this world but that's it. It can't be used to buy something neither does it hold any special value as an antique. I got it from the Goddess but it lacks any authenticity. What can I do with just a medal.

Was I supposed to ask how to use it as well or is the Goddess actually messing with me? Shit! I cursed and gripped the medal tightly but still nothing happened. In the first place, I have tried this many times already. I called to it to lend me strength many times but it was useless. Probably, I don't know how to use it. I can tell that. Even though I really needed its help right now, it was useless.

That's why, once more--

“Oi.....”

Just at that moment, the great door to the cathedral opened with a great noise. No, it'd be better to say that it exploded. The double doors blew away and its fragments hit the injured and stopped only when it hit the wall.

Due to this sudden occurrence, the cathedral returned to silence. But that only lasted for a second.

First, screams rose. Screams and shrieks of despair reached my ears. The Priests ran here and there looking for a way to escape as the soldiers and knights who could move picked their weapons. And only then, finally, I was able to look at the place where the gate was as well. What had appeared was a black demon. No something similar to a demon. I had yet to see an actual demon but I had read about them in books so I was somewhat aware of what they looked like. But the demon that had appeared had many differences from what I had read.

2 legs, 2 arms and a head. Appearance similar to a human was the main characteristic of a demon but its whole body was currently covered in crustacean like armour, and the 4 compound eyes on its head were releasing a red light. And above all, it's mouth wasn't small at all like a human. It opened sideways like a true insect. It was completely different than a human or a demon.

It's whole body was protected by magical energy. It didn't

even wear armour like humans or normal demons did. It was completely different from anything I had read about in the books.

“Hiiii!!”

“That thing!”

I remembered that demon. It’s the one that was standing at the very front of the ones that attacked us at the training grounds. And also the one that made Souichi faint with one attack.

Even though O’Brien-san and others tried to hold it back, it’s no standing here. Realizing what that meant, I quickly shook my head. Think, about the situation at hand first!

But while looking at the Priests running away, and the injured lying around, my body refused to move. Was this fear, or something even deeper? Unable to even move my gaze, I looked at the demon. And for some reason, it felt like that that demon’s compound eyes were——looking at me.

Next instant, the knight rushed towards the demon with their weapons. Three of them. Due to the injured lying around and the couches in the cathedral, it was impossible for too many to fight at once.

But before the knights could even attack it, the demon pointed its right arm towards the knights. And with just the swing of the its arm, blood sprayed in the air. As if the shadow held its own will, it matched the movement of the demon’s arm and cut the knights apart.

It was not just blood that flew. Flesh--limbs, torso, cut apart armour, all flew in the air.

In a panic, I blocked Hiyuu-chan's eyes with my hand, but I was too slow. As if she had lost all strength, her body limped towards me. She had fainted.

"Hiyuu-chan!?!"

Flustered, I called her name but got no reaction. The next moment, the arm of the demon swung again. Once again, screams rose and blood spilled. While hearing the wails and death cries of the knights, I picked up my sword lying on the ground. And by the time, I drew my sword, only us and the priests who had run till the end of the cathedral were alive. Every knight and soldier that challenged the demon were now lying in a pool of blood. Nobody was moving. The smell of blood and the scene in front of me made me feel like vomiting what I ate in the morning but somehow I resisted to and walked to the centre of the cathedral with my sword in hand. It's not like I had come up with some plan. In my head, I knew that it was suicide to challenge this monster even Souichi couldn't beat.

But still, I stood there. The demon took a step forward. It stepped on the pool of blood, splash I felt like I heard such a sound.

My tip of the sword was shivering from fear, but I couldn't help it. The existence in front of me was simply too scary. I didn't even think of something like 'I must fight it', 'I must

stop it'. My body simply moved by instinct. Most probably, it was the same for the other soldiers and knights as well.

While raising a shout that hurt my throat, I slashed towards the demon. Was it thanks to O'brien-san's training or was it just a miracle that I was able to react in time? The moment that demon swung his arm, I bent over and dodged the shadow's attack. Slipping over the pool of blood I swung my sword as it hit its head and made sparks fly. Rather than calling it just hard, it felt like I just hit something giant gigantic and tough something. The demon showed absolutely no reaction to being hit by the sword either. Let alone back away, it didn't even move a single bit.

“uu, ah.”

Instead, I ended up taking a step back. Maybe it lost interest in me, it simply ignored me and walked past me. Even though it wasn't any taller than me in size, the pressure it gave off was in a whole different level. splash splash as it walked it spoiled the beautiful carpet and couches around. It's destination was—the unconscious Hiyuu-chan and Souichi-kun who was still receiving treatment.

The moment I realized that, I ran so fast that I surprised myself. I slashed it once more from behind. clank with a shrill sound, my hand numbed from the impact. But still, the demon didn't stop moving. Once more! But it still didn't stop. Twice, thrice, I continued but—it just didn't stop. At last, maybe because I continued hitting hit, I became unable to hold the sword and it dropped out of my hand.

Then, finally, the demon stopped moving and looked at me with its compound eyes. The next instant, I got blown away. For a second, I felt gravity disappear, and suddenly I hit one of the couches and fell down to the ground with incredible force. I don't even know what happened to me. From the centre of the cathedral, I had been blown away almost to the gate.. It actually took me time to realize how far I had been blown. Maybe because I had rolled over the pool of blood and entrails, the pungent smell of it all struck my nose. I felt like vomiting again but somehow, I held it back.

“gu, ahh”

“I couldn't breathe properly. Did I break some of my bones was I just hurt badly. Feeling pain I had never felt before, I even forgot how to breathe. My chest hurt. Was I punched? Or was I kicked? Or did it use magic on me? While in confusion, I rolled up trying to bear with the pain.

Giving a single glance at me, the demon's gaze turned back --towards Hiyuu-chan.

“Ah.”

A lifeless voice came out of me.

The priests had gathered at the very end of the cathedral, shivering in fear and the knights had all been killed. There was no one to save her. No. one. At. All.

“No..”

I stretched my hand. There was no meaning. Above all, I was still lying near the gate in the pool of blood and the demon was in the centre of the cathedral. Even the distance was despairingly big.

In panic, I tried to stand up only to slip in the blood and fall back. My hand touched the hand of someone lying in front of me. It was only a wrist lying there. There were others, parts of the body, entrails, heads with eyes wide in despair, heads with still there helmet on.....I was surrounded by parts of flesh.

“uug.”

I threw up. Vomiting everything I had eaten today but still unable to stop, I vomited my gastric juices. The acid burnt my throat and tears came out from the pain.

—But, I stood up. Did my sense of pain get paralyzed from vomiting too much, or maybe my mind has gone crazy by being surrounded by entrails and body parts? The sharp pain in my chest turned dull. I wiped my mouth only to taste and smell blood. I was lying in a pool of blood. Even my arms hands have been stained completely. No, my whole body has been stained in blood.

“Let’s do this.”

I said that to myself. Saying that, I hardened my resolve. My surroundings was overflowing with death, my senses have gone mad. Even though I can never match this monster, it’s crazy that I still stood up.

Holding back the dully paining chest with my left arm, I picked up a sword from the hand of a soldier who was missing the rest of his body. I had lost my earlier sword after all. My hand, and legs were stiffer than I thought. But still—if I didn't move now, it'll be Hiyuu-chan and Souichi-kun who'd become a part of this pool of blood next.

Hearing me, the black demon stopped. And slowly, with ease, he turned to look at me over its shoulders. It's red eyes looked at me and that alone made my body shrink with fear as if my heart had been gripped directly. But still, I pointed the sword at that demon. I must have looked amusing as I stood like that shivering with my sword.

And, as if sneering at me, it turned completely towards me.

What?

Is its aim not Hiyuu-chan and Souichi? I became suspicious but I'm glad that it stopped moving at least. Now all that's left is—all that's left is.....

What should I do next? Should I fight this monster? It defeated Souichi, broke through O'brien-san and others. Should I fight this monster, the one that created this tragic situation?

It's useless. You can't win.

Someone whispered that.

The next corpse will only change from the kids to yours, that's all.



Someone whispered again.

Run away.

Again.

Run away.

It's voice became louder.

Run away.

My shivering sword slightly lowered.

Run away.

But still, I tightly gripped the sword.

Run away.

“Your opponent is right here, motherfucker!!”

While shouting in voice so loud that I surprised myself, I ran towards it.

I slashed at it with all my strength but was unable to even hit it, let alone scratch its armour. It simply dodged me by taking just a step back. Hitting the floor instead, my hand went numb but I used all my strength to continue the attack with a rising reverse slash. But once again, my attack was dodged just by taking a step back.

gichi It's bug-like mouth made a sound.

It was laughing.

The moment I understood that, I rammed myself at it to break its stance. If my sword won't hit, I just need to create a

situation where I won't miss. But I was unable to do that, in fact, it only ended with my left shoulder hurting. The demon didn't even budge an inch. It felt as if I had just rammed into a huge rock.

The next moment, it grabbed me by my chest with one hand and lifted me up. Floating in the air, I tried struggling against its one arm grabbing me but it didn't flinch at all. I was lifted up till I was looking down at it right now. And then, it threw me away like it was nothing.

Thrown directly at the foot of the silver statue of the goddess, my back hit the hard stone and I lost my breath. And at the same time, screams rose again. It must be the priests inside the cathedral. My vision swayed from the pain as I used my both hands to lift my face up.

Calmly, the black demon walked slowly towards me. I tried to pick up my sword but it wasn't beside me anymore. I must have let go of it when I was thrown away.

“.....Shit.”

Even my words lacked strength now. My body seemed to have lost its energy as well.

Why did it end up like this? We were summoned to save this world by the goddess. Is the conclusion to the reality of that fairy tale like situation supposed to be this painful? As I lay my body on the soft carpet, my eyelids seemed to get heavier. If I just closed my eyes right now, I'll be at peace. The fear would disappear. Without feeling any sort of pain or

fear, dying while in sleep is---

“—Not okay in any goddamn way!!”

I raised my head with vigour. The black demon was.....still standing in the same place as before. I didn't hear the voices of the Priests crying for help or the voices of agony of the injured anymore either.

It was looking directly behind me—

“ahn?”

Tracing its gaze, I turned to look back as well. My whole body pained just from turning my body but I felt like I could forget about that pain as well. There, the beautiful, silver statue of the goddess.....was for some reason, shining. It's radiance felt divine, and warm. My heart that had been shivering with fear felt like it was being warmed up by that light. Just looking at it made the despair inside me go away.

I know this light. I recall seeing it. I recall feeling it.---

The Goddess, Astraera.

It's the light that filled the space where I first met her, it's the aura she gave off. The warm light coming from the silver statue--the magical energy, was the same as the one released by the goddess.

“wha.....What's going on?”

Pain disappeared from my body. No, not just pain, the blood that stained my whole body was cleaned away and disappeared becoming pale light.

I wonder if that took a moment, or a few seconds or even longer. As I kept on dazedly looking at the statue, before I realized, a woman with golden hair was standing beside me. Enveloped in the light of magical energy, as if she had been blessed by the Goddess, or as if she served the Goddess herself, she stood beside me.

That scene looked so fantastical, and beautiful. She was like those holy women or princesses that appear in fairy tales. It made me completely forget even the smell of blood permeating the whole cathedral.....that woman was pure, holy, and simply beautiful.

Her gaze turned.....and looked at me. She had almost cold-like jade green eyes, golden hair that looked like they were made of silk and a pure white dress that seemed to almost reflect and dance with the sunlight coming from the window. Her hair seemed to have been tied up properly yet seemed long and it fluttered in the torrent of magical energy coming from the statue. She took one step forward. With a shururi sound her long dress slid on the carpet. The sound of it clearly reached my ears.

“Are you alright, Renji-sama?”

She spoke to me. That voice felt, like a boy yet like that of a woman's, almost androgynous and felt good to listen to. The owner of that voice knelt beside me as if she didn't even give a care about the demon.



“Now, please stand up.”

She gave me her hand. Somehow, without hesitation—I

took her hand. If I stand up I'll have to fight that black demon once again. A monster that seemed like the embodiment of despair itself. There was no chance of victory. Even though I knew all that, I stood up without hesitation.

Her hand was small. Soft, pretty, a woman's hand. Yet, it held strength.

—And that strength, was my [power].

Her cold eyes narrowed while looking at me. For a second, her expression changed to that of a gentle smile. But, only for a second. It soon became rigid again. And then, she looked at the black demon.

For some reason, the demon had still not moved even a single step after the statue began shining. It was as if—it was waiting for me to stand up.

“Let's go, Renji-sama.”

“.....ye..yeah.”

Finally, gichigichi a sound came.

That grating sound came from the mouth of that demon. It was laughing. I got goosebumps looking at the demon laughing like that.

We faced each other. Inside this cathedral, that was supposed to be peaceful, while being looked over by the statue of the goddess.

The whole cathedral shook greatly. Someone out there must have used a very strong magic.

At that moment, the golden haired woman disappeared and turned to jade coloured particles of light. I became surprised but it soon changed to exaltation. Power rose inside me. I wonder if this power is what magical energy feels like. A power that others had yet I didn't. this must be it.

The woman, who had appeared suddenly, had no disappeared and that light concentrated in my hand.....and became one sword. It's blade was jade green, the handle and decorations were in gold. As I swung that feather-like light sword towards an empty couch, it tore into two without any resistance. My face cramped at the sharpness of the sword. It was completely different from the swords I had used in the training ground whether in terms of weight, sharpness, in basically everything.

gichii the black demon laughed again. It's legs finally moved—towards, me.

I looked at the sword in my hand. It's gem-like beautiful blade might look like it was weak but I felt that it was strong. I put strength in the hand holding the sword.

I recalled that that woman's eyes were also similarly jade green in colour. The gold of the handle as well, was the same colour as her hair. When I realized that, it felt like the sword in my hand was that girl herself.

- .
- .
- .
- .

As I opened my eyes, a familiar face came into my view looking closely at me.

“.....what are you doing Anastasia.”(renji)

“Hmm. Observing?”(ana)

“You’re heavy.”

“I am not!?!”

Considering what to do about this doll-sized fairy sitting on me for a second, I gave up and rose up and she rolled down and fell off the bed. She seemed to be complaining something but, it was your own fault you know?

As I thought, I was just dreaming and I was back in the room I had been given in the castle. The furniture set in my room and the clear sky outside was still the same but there was no smoke rising and neither could I hear screams anymore.

It was the same peaceful world without the Demon God.

Will that be considered a good dream or a bad one? I couldn’t decide. Should I feel nostalgic and happy about dreaming about Eru or should I be sad to have witnessed that many lives lost?



[Puhh.]

Suddenly, that voice resounded in my head.

Hearing the sudden spurt of laughter from the very familiar voice, I turned to look towards my pillow in confusion. There, the golden medal the exact same as from my dream was kept.

“Good Morning, Ermenhilde.”

[Yeah. Looks like you had a good sleep, eh?]

“Well yeah, I had a good dream.”

[Didn't seem like that to me though?]

But her enjoying voice suddenly went silent.

[You were making a lot of noise while sleeping, you know?]

“Because I had a good dream.”

[Oi.]

“Well, that was probably because Anastasia was too heavy.”

Saying that, I stood up from my bed.

Suddenly becoming curious about anastasia, I looked underneath the bed but she wasn't there anymore. While I was confused, I heard the sound of my window opening. It seems in the instant I looked below, she ran out of the room. To use the window, how very fairy-like.

I wonder what happened? Well her eccentricity isn't really

a new thing but it's not like I'd get angry at her for sitting on my chest either. I became a bit curious seeing her run away like that.

“What's up with her?”(renji)

[Take a look at the mirror.]

While not understanding what Eremnhilde meant, I looked for a mirror. On looking, I understood what she meant.

“That son of a bitch.”

[She's a girl though?]

“Who cares about that?!”

While replying to Ermenhilde's tsukkomi, I rubbed the scribbling on my face with my fingers. Since she had used ink, it spread on my face on rubbing.

Goddamn that prank loving fairy idiot. How could she.....

[It's Renji's fault for not waking up even though she kept on doing that.]

“Even if you say that.....you could have said something, at least.”

[I tried waking you up but you didn't. haven't you grown a bit too relaxed?]

“.....Maybe I have.”

I had no excuse so I could only agree with a shrug. But still, what do I do about this face? My face was currently filed

with scribbling and drawings. She must have been on my chest because she was doing this to me. Even though she's actually older than me, she's still so childish.

"Say, Ermenhilde?"

[What?]

"In my dream, did I say something?"

[Hm? No.....]

Unable to understand what I myself wanted to say, I scratched my head. I'm still half-asleep I guess. I thought of asking a maid to get some water to wash my face, but then again, I don't want to go out with this face either. What do I do?

[Renji.]

"What?"

While I was thinking about how to deal with the scribbling on my face, Ermenhilde spoke up with a meek voice.

Her voice was familiar.....the same as when she's worried about something.

[No, nevermind.]

"I see."

Should I pursue the topic right now?

I thought about it for a second but decided not to at the very end. If something was the matter, she'd ask me herself.

While thinking of that, I changed my thoughts back to the problem at hand. Was I just running, or was this my trust in her?

It's probably the former, I think.

I had a dream. Not about Ermenhilde, but of Eru. That has happened many times before and not anything new. Eru died. And now I live with Ermenhilde.

It's just.....their voices are same. It's like talking to the same person but is actually completely different. I wanted forget about it. I end up treating and overlapping Ermenhilde with another person. That was, to me.....and to Ermenhilde as well, something very cruel. That's why, I was unable to ask Ermenhilde of her worries.

“What should I do with this face?”(renji)

[Just ask a maid to get you some water to wash it.]

“Yeah, I guess, but..”

It's going to be really embarrassing but I guess I can't help it. For the time being, I decided to make Anastasia's punishment 3 times harsher and looked for the bell to call a maid.

Since I barely use it, I had no idea where it was and it took a few minutes to find it. The bell was kept right at the centre of the table in the middle of the room. How the hell did I even miss that?

I called for the maid to fetch me some water but her face

was more surprised rather than amused. Well, I guess seeing a man just woken up with scribbling on his face would surprise most rather than make them laugh?

Closing the window, I sat down on the bed. Picking up Ermenhilde from my pillow side, I caressed its edge.

[What happened?]

“No, just thinking how peaceful it is right now.”

[That’s great and all but it’s so uncool to say that with that face, you know?]

“Wha, well, I guess, you’re right.”

As I gave a laugh, Ermenhilde made a tired sigh.

This is fine. This mood is just fine.

[.....how deplorable.]

“Don’t say that. It’s very like me, right?”

As if replying to me, a small laugh resounded in my head.

[Maybe it really is, I guess.]

And, she said that.

## Chapter 46: Fighting Tournament (4)

Inside the tranquil space, a clear ringing voice resounded. Inside the Cathedral built in the castle, in front of the statue of the Goddess, a woman dressed in an extravagant robe was giving a prayer while kneeling. They were words praising the Goddess Astraera and were filled with reverence. I wonder what kind of feelings go through the Goddess when she sees people worshipping her like this. The name of the woman offering the prayer was Amalda Imnesia. The daughter of this country's king. i.e The Princess of the kingdom.

Her robe was made of a pure silk-like material with silver embroidery matching her silver hair. Her hands linked in prayer were small and her body seemed delicate that the excessive ornaments on her seemed to be difficult to move in. On her side was a tall knight but he seemed even taller beside her as she was slightly shorter than average height.

Normally, calling her cute rather than beautiful would be more apt but right now, even she could only be referred to as a dignified beauty. To her side was the tall knight, her lover, dressed in a mithril armour brilliantly decorated with gems. An extremely good looking couple. Even the 'gap'/difference between their tall body and short stature only seemed to make them look better. I wonder how many of them here are actually looking at those two right now. The beauty and the beast. Wait, that's a wrong analogy.

Even in public, the distance between those two is less. I wonder if that's done unconsciously. But no one would dare to find fault with that either. Not even the king, her father. How great that is. Seeing my other worldly comrade marry into power and wealth with full family approval almost made me feel slightly envious along with happiness. If their relationship continues to get better, one day he'll be the next king of this country. But knowing what kind of guy Kuuki is,

I couldn't really imagine him as a king at all.

While I was thinking of such random things, the prayer continued in the princess's beautiful voice. Even though the cathedral was filled with almost a hundred people, her voice could be heard very clearly and distinctly. Everyone was silent, and were listening to her as if they had forgot to even breathe. It felt as if her sound resounded directly inside our bodies.

"I wonder how long till those two get married?"(renji)

"Shhh!"

When I spoke up , I got scolded by Utano-san beside me.

Why is it that all the ceremonies in this world are so damn long? At least in a fantasy world, they could be shorter right? Or maybe it could be that since the existence of Gods is a fact, their prayers are even longer and more detailed than ours. I wasn't really religious even back then so I haven't really heard much of those prayers either though.

On the opposite side of me, Souichi also seemed to be fidgeting in discomfort. Though probably not as much as me, he's also pretty bored I guess. And Aya seemed to be scolding him as well for that though. Others don't realize but she seemed to have already stepped on Souichi's foot quite a few times already.

Maybe she caught me hiding a yawn, Utano-san also poke me over the armour. Looking at her, I saw that her eyes seemed to be even colder and narrower than usual. Honestly speaking, it's scary. She already has sharp pointed eyes, but when she further narrows them, I end up raising a white flag

out of instinct. She herself is pretty conscious of her eyes though. I feel like that her eyes really suit her face though.

But still, I'm so sleepy. It can't be helped, I'm not good with such formal stuff. Well, I do think that it's imprudent of me though. And I didn't get much sleep last night so yawns just couldn't be avoided.

It's a childish excuse but it's a fact so I can't help it. The tournament table had been decided and was given to me only making my head ache. Not in the actual, disease way but more in a mental manner.

As I stirred my body a bit, my mithril armour made clanking noises. The sound wasn't big enough to feel loud but I did feel that a few knights' gaze turned towards me making me feel embarrassed. Aah, hurry up and end this already!

The armour on me felt heavy. Normally, I don't even wear light armour so this heavy mithril armour felt like shackles on me. Even though mine is still far lighter than the iron armour the normal knights are wearing.

It's a distinctive feature of this world that I have to wear such decorative armour for such formal events no matter what. It's pretty similar to how we wore suits back in our world. Though this is incomparably heavier, stuffier and difficult to move in than suits. Not to mention, I have to stand in attention pose for all this time which is killing my back.

[fumu. As usual, I simply cannot understand such ceremonies you humans do.]

Ermenhilde's voice resounded inside my head. Her voice was also beautiful



enough to not lose to the voice singing the prayer but I couldn't reply to her right now considering the situation. She must be bored as well as her voice seemed to be more tired than normal. I think Utano-san and Souichi nearby also heard her as I felt the gazes at me increase. Why is everyone looking at me? While holding thoughts that may make me look like I'm overly self-conscious, I gave a light sigh. Utano-san poked my armour again.

But anyway, I understood what Ermenhilde meant. Astraera—the goddess that the humans worship doesn't like such overly formal ceremonies herself. Or rather, she doesn't understand why they have to be so strict and formal about it. That woman, in her way, likes to simply enjoy fun things. Maybe the reason she watches over this world, and tried to protect them from the hands of the Demon King was.....probably because she enjoyed seeing the daily lives of humans of this world.

I haven't heard this from her mouth directly but I think it's true. That's the kind of Goddess she is.

I looked towards the silver statue of the Goddess. For something created by humans, it resembles her actual appearance way too much I think. Well, if I said that to her directly, she'd get angry like a raging fire though. But still, I feel that the statue captures her specific characteristics quite well.

Apparently, a long, long time ago, she had appeared directly in some sculptor of that time or something like that, I think. And the statue he created in her semblance is the one in the cathedral. Though it's obvious what may have actually happened. She has a very playful side to her after all, she must have been bored and done that on a whim. Although why exactly did she choose to appear in that man's dream, I'm not sure.

[Astraera-sama loves fun celebrations and good food more than stuff like this

though.]

There's no way a human would know that, right? Though, that's what she should say by coming in another man's dream to be honest.

The fact that she doesn't means that she probably finds this amusing as well. Or maybe, she's just trying to keep her image as a Goddess intact.

She's one of the pillars that created the world, she must enjoy being revered like this as well. I don't really understand her thoughts though.

After a while, finally, the prayer ended.

After this, there was also the ceremony for the starting of the tournament, then the king, a man with a brilliant white beard, will be giving a speech and the O'brien-san, the Knight commander, will be giving a word of motivation to encourage the participants.

This is the 3rd time I'll be taking part after all, I'm pretty used to the ceremony patterns already. The actual tournament itself starts from tomorrow, but all the ceremonies are done one day earlier. Tomorrow, a much more simpler ceremony will take place in the arena in front of the audience.

.

.

.

After the ceremony was over, the atmosphere in the cathedral felt more like a party of nobles. The peacefulness wasn't there anymore and everyone was freely talking to each other.

Students that'll be taking part in tomorrow's team battles or sons of noble families, knights of the castle and magicians as well. The heavy and serious atmosphere from before had disappeared.

Looking for familiar faces, I saw Souichi, Aya and Masaki-chan talking with friends, probably from their respective schools. In contrast to the students in school uniform, Souichi and the others were wearing their respective ceremony-use armour and magician robes. Among those students was also Ms Francesca. She seemed more closer to them probably since she knew me well. But still, as I thought, she really is much more 'grown' as compared to other students of her age. Especially when standing beside Aya and Masaki-chan. If those 2 heard me they'd definitely throw right inside a nest of monsters though.

As I gazed at them while resting on one of the walls of the cathedral, Utano-san, wearing a tight black robe, came walking towards me and stood beside me resting on the wall as well.

"Hm?"

"No, you just seemed lonely so.."(utano)

[Well Renji does shrink back from everything in places like these after all.]

“It’s really not like that though.”(renji)

Scratching my chin, I said that.

True, it’s as Ermenhilde says but I didn’t feel like agreeing to that. Maybe because I’m wearing an iron gauntlet, it actually hurt scratching my chin.

“I simply didn’t have anyone to talk to.”

“That’s lonely in its own way.”(utano)

“I am aware of that.”

Well, neither do I have classmates like Souichi and others nor am I on specifically good terms with any nobles like Utano-san. It’s only normal that I’d feel out of place. If someone came up to talk to me, I’d happily continue the conversation but I can’t walk to someone and start a conversation myself. I myself realize what a lonely personality I have.

I’m really grateful to Utano-san who came up to talk to me. If she had not come, I would have probably left the cathedral sooner or later alone feeling lonely. That would have been so sad that it could make someone cry. It’s fine. At least I have Ermenhilde.....If that happened, there would be no saving me. But then again, that’s basically how I am.

“Oh right, about the tournament table...”

“What about it?.....”

When I spoke of it, Utano-san averted her gaze clearly. It wouldn't stand out as much as it did if it wasn't Utano-san who basically has a habit of directly staring you down normally. Thus it seemed very suspicious.

No well, I'm not really blaming her for anything.

"My opponent changed so I was a bit surprised, that's all."(renji)

".....I see."

[Yeah, that was surprising but I'm also grateful for that.]

"Grateful eh?.....I wonder about that."

While replying to Ermenhilde like that, I realized I was smiling a bit.

My opponent in the first round was supposed to be Souichi but now the opponent was someone else. Most probably, she must have heard from Aya that I was actually planning to put some effort into it and must have changed it at the last moment. After all, if Souichi wasn't supposed to be my opponent in the first place, she wouldn't have called me to ask about it back then. That said, I was still planning on putting some effort into this even if my opponent was someone unbeatable like Souichi though, so this wasn't really necessary.

"But, if possible.....at least you could have given a bit easier opponent."

[Seriously. What happened to all your motivation now?.....]

“Really, show some energy. I’d like it more if you’d have a bit more pride in yourself.”(utano)

No but, I know that there’s no ‘easy’ opponent among everyone taking part in the tournament but still, I can’t help but speak like that. My opponent in the first round was O’Brien Arbelia. The Knight Commander and also my teacher for sword fighting.

Honestly speaking, I have never won against him. Just thinking about how I’d have to fight against him in front of the public just makes my head hurt.

How should I say this but, at least I had an excuse if I lost against Souichi. It may sound uncool, but my opponent is the Brave of the 13 heroes. Nobody would have any problem even if I lost to him. Just putting up a good fight would be enough to fire up the audience. But against O’Brien-san.....someone not a hero, that won’t do. No matter how weak, I’m one of the Heroes. To lose against anyone other than the remaining heroes would not be accepted. All the more so considering we are considered as the saviours of this world by the people.

I know how strong O’Brien-san is. In a fair frontal battle, he’s stronger than me. That’s why this is troubling. Very troubling.

In front of such an audience, and not allowed to even lose, I have to fight against an opponent much stronger than me. Well, my head hurts but it’s not something new for me. In a situation where I simply couldn’t lose, I had to fight against far more stronger opponents. For someone, or something, I let my life hang on the balance. Demon God, the Demon Lord, cunning Demons and strong monsters, compared to all those this much more easier. AT least my life isn’t on

the line. The fact that I'm still not allowed to lose is still the same though.

Well, I could say that I have to be actually serious to do this. In such situation, the state of your mind is very important after all.

"I'm glad."

A small voice came from beside me. Looking that way, even though a lot of people were here, Utano-san looked at me with a gentle smile. When our gazes met, her eyes narrowed but with warmth and gentleness I had never seen before.

"Though only a little, but your expression and face has become better."(utano)

With a soft expression, she said that.

My face, eh? While thinking of that, I traced my face with my gauntlet wearing hand. The coldness of the steel felt nice inside the cathedral that had become quite warm due to the crowd.

"My face is the same normal one as before though?"(renji)

"Seriously.....But I guess your habit of avoiding topics like that hasn't changed at all."

"Humans don't change that easily."

“Yeah, it’s as you say.”

I wonder what she meant by that. I wanted to ask, but decided not to. But this time, I averted my gaze from her. I really wish I could learn how to keep calm in such situations.

“.....Aya said that I had changed though?”(renji)

“fufu, is that so?”

As she laughed, softly, the beautiful smell of flowers came to me. Utano-san, implying that she was done talking, finally walked away. I simply looked at her back as she walked away without even trying to hide it. Her flaxen hair gently swayed as she walked and I could see her body line underneath the tight robe she wore.

[Didn’t she seem a bit more cheerful than usual?]

“Yeah.”

And also,.....she must have been worried about me. My heart was filled with feelings of apology.

Without saying anything, she kept on caring and worrying about me. Or am I being a bit too conceited? I recalled her words on the first night after I came back to the capital.

———how long will you keep on travelling around?



“She’s a really nice person.”

[Yes, she is.]

Am I near the end of my journey, or am I still not even halfway through it?

Since I didn’t know even that, her concern and consideration for me was——  
should I be happy or should I ask her to stop it?

Thinking till that, straightened my back resting on the wall. Since I’m done talking, there’s no need to be here anymore. Though it’d be fun to talk to Souichi and others, it’d be difficult to talk without gathering too much attention here. Right now, here, I’m not the adventurer Renji but one of the Heroes, Yamada Renji.

Feeling a few gazes, I realized that many people were looking at me while talking to each other. Going by their top-class clothes, they must be nobles. Nobles like that, or rather, their gossiping and talks with them, I’m really not good with it so I decided to run out as soon as possible.

“Not even going to greet me, Renji?”

Just when I was about to mix in with the crowd and get out, someone called to me.

Timidly, I turned around to see an old man with a great white beard and an grand atmosphere around him——the top man of this kingdom, King Joshua. As

usual, he's super casual and friendly or rather, very frank. You wouldn't think he's a king the way he comes and talks to you so easily.

"No, no such thing....."(renji)

"You're formal and stiff as usual. All of you are."

"My lord is too informal, that's all."

When I said that, the young man with a good physique walking beside the king gave a nod as if he totally agreed with me. This man was the Prime Minister of the country, Warren-sama. Though he was agreeing with me, he's not any better than the king and is pretty informal as well. You wouldn't think that these two are the top who control every political matter of this country.

Unlike our world, this world doesn't have that many countries, races or ideologies. In terms of countries, there's only [Imnesia Kingdom], [Elfreim], and [Abenelm.] Rather than saying different ideologies, it's more like that are 3 different religious groups that have three different gods they worship. Humans like us, Beastmen like Mururu and Demihumans like Feirona. There's no trade with the demons so there's no connection with them at all.

I'm not interested in politics at all so I'm not well informed but the politics of this world is not as complicated as ours. Rather than a government that would follow the principles of its people, what this world required more is a vessel that would answer to the thoughts and needs of the people. In that sense, I guess a man like him is fitting to be the King. Also, he is pretty serious and wise depending on the situation as well. On the other side of the King was O'brien-san, who was currently scratching his chin looking somewhat troubled. I feel the same.

“It has been a long time My lord.”(renji)

“Don’t mind it. I’m always being helped by Yuuko and Kou. Give them my thanks as well.”(king)

“Yes.”

“.....seriously, you guys are too stiff. I said this before as well but in terms of status, you people are above than even me.”

“Oh no, definitely not.”

The king of country and Heroes from another world who saved the world.

I don’t want to think who the public would support more but I wouldn’t consider ourselves to be higher in status. Beside King Joshua, Warren-sama seemed to be clearing his throat but the king didn’t pay attention to anyone. It’s a scene I’m used to seeing but once again, I feel like I’ll tear up seeing Warren-sama’s everyday troubles.

“Seriously. My guts went cold when you were brought in gravely injured.”(king)

“That’s—”

“And even so, you didn’t even come to meet me after healing up. At least accompany for a drink or two sometimes.”

That's impossible. I wanted to say that but my mouth cramped up stopping me from doing so. It might be a great honour to be told that by a king of the country but I feel like I'd be unable to even taste what I'm drinking just from the nervousness. And the day I end up saying something stupid, just what would happen to me? Thinking about that alone makes my stomach hurt. In the first place, it'd be weird for an adventurer to go around meeting the king so casually. But this man doesn't seem to think that way it seems.

As if he understood my feelings, O'brien-san was giving a smile and Warren-sama was giving a sympathetic sigh. Really, this man should consider his position.....thinking that, I felt sorry for him as well.

To be royalty is to live for the sake of the people. I recall him saying that to me once. They are not allowed to be selfish and are to act and live for the betterment of the country and its people.

For the country, for the people, for the world.

To live and to die for such things is what it means to be royalty. Even in this world, it's not like everyone is a good person. But still, I know those who tried to protect the world for everyone else. People who supported and aided us even when they themselves did not have much resources. They helped negotiate with Elfheim, with whom they were at odds with back then, solely for our sake. And there were people who fought against demons with us even when they held no special powers.

All of them are people I truly respect, and one of those is this man.

That's why.....

“Well, after the tournament has ended, I’ll go for a drink with you…….I guess.”(renji)

“Kuku. I see, I see. I’ll look forward to it.”(king)

Saying that, I felt like I regretted it already.

My stomach hurts just thinking about going for a drink with the king himself. This isn’t even the first time I am going for a drink with him either yet I really can’t get used to this. When the time comes, I am definitely dragging either Utano-san or Kuuki along with me.

“It’ll be nice we get to celebrate your victory with drinks and fish as well!”(king)

“ugh.”

So it comes down to that. Seeing my reaction, I wonder what King Joshua thought as he laughed *kakaka*. Rather than a king, he really looked more like a playful old man you could find anywhere. Even O’Brien-san gave a small laugh.

“Please be relieved. We shall do our best to put up a great show that you can truly enjoy Milord. Ain’t that right, Renji?”(ob)

“…….Sure.”

“What’s with that pathetic reply, fool. You’re in front of the king.”(ob)

Guh, putting me in trouble, O'brien-san reproached me with an amused voice. Most of the people in the royal castle know of my true strength. Probably only the newer employees would be unaware of that. Of course, the King and Prime Minister are also aware.

That's how famous my normalcy (read as-weakness) is. But even then, they keep on making such unreasonable demands out of me. In fact even people I expect to get me out of such trouble somehow end up saying things that put me in more mess.

"Nowadays, even Amalda enjoys spending time with Yuuta more than me. Help me with my loneliness, Renji."(king)

"I don't know how much I can help you, but I shall try my best milord." (renji)

"umu. But, don't be reckless okay? There are far too many people that worry whenever you get injured. Isn't that so, Prime Minister?"(king)

"Wha?"

"And also.."

Then, his tone became a bit heavier, more serious.

Those words were spoken as a king, not just an old man. As the man who leads this country.

“The ones that need to be entertained are the people. Even though the threat of the Demon God has been removed, the world is still far from being peaceful. Even if only for the time till the tournament ends, I hope that the people can forget about demons and monsters and enjoy the fights.”

“I’ll give my all to rise up to your expectations, Milord.”

“Fuh. You didn’t have to speak so formally there though. Just a normal ‘Understood’ would suffice.”

“Understood.”

Giving the reply, I moved to the side and let him move on.

It seems our talk had gathered quite a lot of attention as when the king finally moved, the crowd surrounding split to give him way making him look like Moses. I looked at king Joshua’s back as he walked away. Among the various gazes, I saw a familiar woman with blonde hair—Ms Francesca was also there. I was about to scratch my head in embarrassment as usual but stopped. Not in front of the king, it’d be rude. That man probably wouldn’t care about it though.

[fufu. Looks like you’ve finally lost all escape routes, eh?]

“I doubt I had one in the first place.”

I replied that to Ermenhilde.

As one of the summoned, as one who killed a god, as one who people depend

upon, I'll take part in the tournament. Then, I know I cannot give an unsightly performance.

At least, in my own way, I've decided to try my best. No matter who my opponent, I just have to fight with my all.

.....The fact that I still couldn't say that I'll definitely win is, uncool, or maybe, I'm still tense.

"Now then, let's get out of here."

Souichi and others are still with their classmates, I couldn't see Utano-san either. Her dress must have been too uncomfortable and she must have gone back to her room. I want to get out of this armour asap as well. Though we had them made specifically for ourselves, I guess you never can get used to such difficult to move in clothes. I couldn't even wear light armour even back then.

I did see Ms Francesca but I shouldn't go talk to her right now. Even if she is a daughter of a noble family it'd be troublesome for her to gather unnecessary attention as well.

"Huh, Renji-niichan, you're going back already?"

Just when I was about to leave the cathedral, this time Souichi came up and spoke to me. His armour seemed to be much more easy to move in than mine but since Souichi was also like me who preferred dodging above blocking attacks, he was not very comfortable in it either. As he walked towards me, his movements looked a bit awkward as well.



“Yeah. I’m bad with such formal ceremonies after all.”(renji)

“Again you.....At least go talk with Aya for some time.”

“As her childhood friend, that’s your job.”

“Mouu.”

Saying that, he gave a sigh. He hasn’t changed much in this sense. I felt warm inside seeing his usual actions.

“So, where is Aya by the way?”(renji)

“There, talking to her friends.”

“.....then is there even any need for me to keep her company?”

She’s talking with her friends, her comrades, with whom she’d be fighting tomorrow in the team battles.

Hearing that, I looked towards her. In a group of girls dressed in school uniforms, a single girl was in a robe. With black hair, rare in this world, the girl was talking happily with her friends.

That’s good. As a 18yr old child, looking at her talk with friends normally feels much better. Yayoi-chan was among them as well but she was looking towards

us instead. That said, she's probably looking at Souichi. Thinking that, I turned my gaze back to Souichi.

"Wait, do you not have any friends?"(renji)

"I do!?"

Then go talk with them rather than me.

"C'mon even Aya is talking with her friends, you should go as well."(renji)

"But look. Except me, all of them are girls."

"Hm?"

Hearing that, I glanced towards their group once more.

Certainly, there was not a single boy in the group. The number of participants in a team were 5 and there are also some reserve members but all of them were girls. Souichi was the lone boy. I guess he would feel a bit awkward in there.

Harem is nothing but an illusion when in fact, it's just a bed of thorns.

"I guess you have it rough as well."(renji)

"Could you stop pushing me to them anyway while saying that?"

“I’m envious of your life, being surrounded by such pretty girls.”

“Stop lying!”

True, I don’t feel a shred of envy.

But of course. A party full of men sounds disgusting but a party with all girls would be tiresome. Men and women are completely different creatures.

While I was playing with Souichi like that, this time Masaki-chan, leading a few men behind her came to us. Here, unlike Souichi’s party, their group had 3 girls and 3 boys. Or rather, I’m really surprised how the Magic Academy’s team turned up with all girls like that. I became a bit curious of their selection criteria.

“You guys seem to be having fun as usual, Souichi, Yamada-san.”(masaki)

“I’m not really enjoying this though.....”(souichi)

“Stop sounding like a wuss when you’re a guy.”(masaki)

I’m pretty sure this guy doesn’t have gynophobia. I guess he’s just become tired of being surrounded by too many women all the time. Even luxury has its price. Yup. It seems Souichi’s bad luck with women isn’t going to end any time soon. As I enjoyed seeing Souichi’s plight, *kacha* a dry sound came to me. Masaki-chan had rest her hand on the katana on her waist. She was also dressed in an extravagant dress as expected of a Hero but she was wearing a skirt below. It must be difficult to move for her as well. For us who fought

against the Demon God, outfits like this that focus on looks feel nothing more than a hindrance after all.

But still, I guess women still enjoy dressing up as she seemed to be in a good mood. People like me and Souichi only feel stressed dressing up though.

But well, even though due to in a good mood, seeing a girl smiling while having a hand on a katana is pretty scary.

“Don’t go easy on me okay? Of course Souichi as well.”(masaki)

“Of course. I don’t intend to lose either.”(souichi)

“I’m not even taking part in the team battles though.”(renji)

Individual battles were day after tomorrow. If I could win against O’Brien-san, it’d be in the 3rd round where I fight Masaki-chan.

Getting to fight Souichi in team battles then also having a chance of fighting Souichi in the individual matches again and also against Kuuki, she must be super excited. Even though she has the looks of a Yamato Nadeshiko, she’s battle maniac at heart. Maybe for the same reason, her comrades behind her also gave the same atmosphere. All of them were battle maniacs. Is this some kind of nightmare?

“It’s fine Yamada-san, I’ll take it out on you in the individual battles.”(masaki)

“.....Eh?”

Why did she say my name while saying that she was going to take it out on me!?

I really didn't understand what she meant. Looking at my confusion she, with a smile that could be accompanied with a halo, replied.

"Aya or Yuuko-san may not get angry with you but I will."

"Wha, uh, whaa.....?"

"Disappearing so suddenly, making us all worry. And when you finally come back after so long, you were so like ~poyaa."

What is this? Even though Masaki-chan is smiling, I am getting really scared here. This is that, it's similar to when utano-san gets angry. When she gets angry, rather than raging like a fire, she becomes still and calm like the surface of a lake even though deep inside she's.....well, like that.

How strange. Masaki-chan only got angry when something concerning Souichi happened. Thinking of that I gave a sidelong glance towards Souichi who is used to facing her anger. Even her comrades took a step back sensing that Masaki-chan was angry.

By the way, Souichi was distancing himself from me. So, I grabbed his shoulder and brought him back to my side.

[I don't get what that ~poyaa~ means but true, Renji has been lifeless lately.]

“Exactly!”(masaki)

“You shut the hell up.”(renji)

Seeing Masaki-chan strongly agree with my dense partner, I slapped the medal from above my trousers with the hand that wasn't holding on to SOuichi.

“And so, 3rd round, I'm looking forward to it.”(masaki)

“Ah, sure.”(reji)

Was she satisfied with just that, she turned around and walked away. Her long hair that went even below her waist swayed around like a tail.

“Hmm, what would happen in case I never made it as far as the 3rd round though?”(renji)

“She'll probably catch in the training grounds sooner or later?”(souichi)

So I have to fight her no matter what eh? No well, I don't mind but I am a bit scared. She won't try to actually kill me right? I think not.

[It seems your reasons to win and advance just increased.]

“Don't sound so happy.”(renji)

[But I am happy.]

This only makes me more terrified though.

Even if we'd be using dulled blades, it still hurts when you get hit by those. Even if she's not used to using western swords, with physical abilities rivalling those of Souichi, facing the [Demonic Sword user] in battle was nothing short of a nightmare.

“Well, I'll give my best anyway.”(renji)

[Yeah. Give it your all, Renji.]

She said that. Her expectations rose for me. Then, I have to work hard.

And— —if it makes you happy, I'd even try winning it. Without saying that, I just thought that in my heart.

## Chapter 47: Team Battles (1)

The sky as clear. Only a few white clouds could be seen and the sun shone bright making us feel warmer than we should as it was winter.

As if this warmth had been the reason, the capital was bursting with energy and liveliness and the main street was filled with people. Along the side of the street, countless stores selling various kinds of eatables were lined up and the appetizing smell of roasted meat and fresh fruits filled the air.

Other than that, shops selling accessories, delicately crafted swords and shields made for decorative purposes were also there. Of course, such stalls were equally crowded as well.

The stone buildings had been decorated and the open windows or swing-doors showed much more customers inside than usual. Especially inside inns and bars. Even though it was still mid day, many people were already drinking beer happily.

Everyone was thoroughly enjoying this day. The whole atmosphere made me feel jolly as well. Seeing such a scene made me feel the peaceful side of this world.

“Even though there’s so much people on the streets, you sure you don’t want to keep your restaurant open?”(renji)

“Well, I was summoned by the king himself, I can’t prioritize my restaurant over that now can I?”



“Well, I guess that’s true.”

Saying that, he sighed. It’s a lighter one than usual but a sigh was a sigh. I felt a bit bad for him as well.

It’s a great thing to be summoned by the king. Though that man feels more like that old energetic man who lives in your neighbourhood rather than the King but if somebody heard me say that, I’ll be thrown in jail for lese majeste so I won’t. And I do respect the man still.

And King Joshua didn’t mean any harm when summoning him either. In fact, the king even goes as far as to listen to all our requests as much as he can as well. But still, he just doesn’t like standing out like that. He is a proper commoner at the very core after all.

[You say that but you don’t hate it either do you?]

“Well, I guess not. It’s rare for all of us to assemble together like this usually after all.”

“That’s sad in its own way.”(renji)

“.....Yamada-san, you’re one of the main reasons for that you know?”

“I had no intention to make it so though?”

As I shrugged my shoulders while passing through the crowd of people, I

could hear his deep sigh even among all this commotion. Was it just my imagination that I felt even coldness and astonishment in his sigh? According to him, the reason why all 13 of us aren't together is because I went away on my journey.

When he says it like that, I guess he probably isn't wrong. I, for one, don't like staying in one place for very long after all. Though I did spend almost months lazing around in the same village. That said, it's pretty much the same if its not a big city like the capital. It's pretty much the same as me not being there. And above that, Souichi and others were living in the Magic city, Masaki-chan was in Tactics City and Yui-chan was.....where the hell was she before this? I feel like someone said that she had been travelling all over the place on her Fafnir.

I don't even know where the rest of them are, so I guess, such occasions were rare. That said, it's still not all 13 of us.

"But still, is it fine to go in those clothes Toudou?"(renji)

"You're the last man I want to hear this from, Yamada-san."(toudou)

[Seriously.]

Toudou was currently wearing extremely casual clothes made of good fabric that most of the people in this city wore. If not for his jet black hair, noone would even think that he was one of the 13 heroes. That's how similar to normal people his clothes were.

Similarly, I looked pretty much the same as any adventurer would. Since it was winter now, I had a fur mantle and thick clothes. Without the mantle and

the mithril sword hanging on my waist, I would also look not any different than normal people. In fact I feel like the elves or beastmen walking around felt more adventurer-like than me.

I wonder what she thought of us as Ermenhilde gave another sigh. It's convenient how her voice directly resounds in my head especially in such crowds and noise.

"That said, I am amazed that you actually felt like taking part in the tournament this time, Yamada-san."(toudou)

"Hm?"

"After all, you can't use Eru-san in the tournament and don't you hate fighting in the first place?"

I looked towards the man beside me who was slightly shorter than me in height. His shoulder long hair, that he simply found too much effort to cut, had been tied behind his head in a small ponytail and it swayed as he walked. Having grown up more from the time we travelled back then, his gentle expression made his face look much more amiable.

Toudou Hiiragi. One of the 13, and my comrade.

Toudou, who was a very good friend of mine, while moving his plump body, walked in a very relaxed manner as if enjoying the atmosphere of the city.

"Well I had my circumstances which resulted in me taking part."

“Hmmm.”

“I may not look it but I am busy with various things, you know?”

” ‘Various things’, eh?”

“Yes, various things.”

[What the hell are you guys even talking?]

These various things include, debt repayment and things like that. It kinda feels pathetic to tell others about it. And listening to Utano-san repays it back anyway.....I feel like a dominated husband. Please let this be just my imagination.

“In my cae, I have just been lonely since nobody comes to my restaurant anymore. Yuuko-san did visit once in a while till some time ago though.”

“Well she’s been busy with tournament and stuff. She’s taken up too much on herself already, or rather, tries to do everything herself.”

“Yeah, I get what you’re saying. That said, it’s because we weren’t of much help that this happened though.”

“That’s true.”

Toudou lacked fighting skills, his job is literally a cook after all. He was the one who always prepared meals for us while on our journey. In my case, I can only fight against monsters with Ermenhilde's help. As a result, all work that used the brain went to Utano-san.

.....well maybe I'm over exaggerating a bit. Even we used our heads once in a while when required. But most of the time, our plans would be full of holes or would be unable to explain what we thought of to others properly. And also, since we had received super powered cheats from the Goddess, we always had the option to just charge in head on. We had a way of fighting that'd be impossible for humans of this world. Now whether that was good thing or not is debateable. In my opinion, it's probably the latter. Now that I think about it, it's amazing how we survived being so reckless like that. No matter how well you could use a weapon or magic, we still were commoners in our heads, it made us realize that.

Even if you learn the results or history of wars, we weren't taught how to set up soldiers and their formations or warfare tactics, *etc.* It was always Utano-san who could convert her and our ideas into a proper [plan]. Much more efficient and safer than charging head on, she led us through the battles.

"It's been one year from then but she still likes to order others around."(renji)

"That probably applies to only you, Yamada-san."

[He's soft towards women after all.]

"Stop saying such misleading things, will you?"

Saying that, I lightly hit Ermenhilde over my pocket.

“Somehow it feels weird.”(toudou)

“Hm?”

“For Yamada-san to call Eru-san by her full name.”

[Really?]

“Or rather.....Eru, that’s also a name though?”(renji)

“Well true but still.”

[Hasn’t it been always like that?]

“Eh?”

At that moment, Toudou certainly stopped in his tracks and looked at me with confusion.

Taking his gaze, I ignored it and continued walking.

“Well, things happened here as well.”(renji)

“.....is that so?”(toudou)

“Ain’t that right, Ermenhilde?”

[Seriously. Like getting new comrades, and a huge debt.]

“Comrades aside, could you not speak about the latter?”

Saying that, I hit Ermenhilde to shut her up.

Seriously, she starts saying useless things the moment I stop paying attention.

“Well, not much has changed.....I guess?”(toudou)

“Who knows? We may have changed somewhat surely. You seem to have put on some weight after all.”

When I made fun of him, he poked me with his elbow. Since he didn’t complain means he’s aware of it as well.

Well he was always on the fatter side but not as much as now. He must be pretty conscious about it, it seems.

I gave a sigh having successfully changed the topic. One day I will have to tell them but somehow, I didn’t have the courage to. Hiding that deep inside my heart, I continued walking while facing forward. Toudou seems to have let go it as well.

“I’ve stopped going on journeys, and don’t even have to fight monsters anymore. You can get Orc meat just by ordering from the adventurer guild after all.”(toudou)

[You should, at least, move your body somewhat in my opinion.]

“Being a cook is still a pretty energy consuming job though.”

Hearing that, though I felt bad, I ended up laughing. This guy won’t be travelling anymore I think, I’m sure.

Managing his own restaurant, having employees, he’s enjoying his different world life already. He’s already become a part of this world completely. As a citizen of the capital. With the danger to the world now gone, he didn’t have any reason to travel around like back then.

He might take up monster subjugation requests once in a while but that’s about it. When I thought about it like that, my friend laughing beside me suddenly felt like he was far away making me feel slightly envious.

“It sounds nice and peaceful, so it’s good.”(renji)

“Of course. Though the danger of monsters and demons is still there, the main problem has been taken care of after all.”

While laughing he said that but he poked me with his elbow again. Realizing what he meant, I felt a bit heavier inside.



The main problem he talked about——the subjugation of the Demon God. It was me who completed it and the number of sacrifices made to achieve that were uncountable. Among those, the person I wanted to protect the most is also included. But.....the capital was filled with smiles. Men and women, whether to my right or left, whether it be humans, demi-humans, beastmen, everyone had smiles on their faces.

Even though there was so much danger in the world, they could still say with confidence that they had peace.

Sometimes I realize how well we have adapted to this world. Back in our own world, I didn't even think about such things.

Even though the capital is protected by huge walls, the threat from monsters was not nil. Though uncommon in Imnesia, there were monsters that could fly. Demons can also fly with magic. there was always a chance that this jolly festivities could instantly turn into a hell of screams and despair.

Even while knowing that, we still consider this world to be at peace. Still, we laugh like this. Not crying and getting depressed over the people who died for this cause was not in any way an insult to those men and women. After all, they put their lives on the line solely for this.

“So Yamada-san, are you taking part in today's team matches?”(toudou)

“No, not in this one. But one of my comrade in my current party is taking part so I thought I'd go cheer them on.”(renji)

“I see.”

When I said that, Toudou sounded happy for some reason.

While giving him a sidelong glance, I bought two skewered Orc meat and gave one to Toudou.

“Thanks. Speaking of comrades, where had you been travelling till now?”(toudou)

[Just roaming around this continent. He spent almost half the year lazing around in just a village though.]

“You’re not supposed to talk about that.”(renji)

“.....what the hell, Yamada-san?”

I saw astonishment mixed in with his sigh at me. Well, I do understand what you mean.

“Half a year is an exaggeration. It was more like, yeah, 3 months of lazing around.”(renji)

“That’s still quite a lot you know.....”

[Not to mention, if he had not met Francesca, he had no intention to start travelling again as well.]

“Going by the name, it was a woman, eh?”(toudou)

[Yes, it was a woman.]

There, for some reason, both of them seemed to have some mutual understanding. These two get along pretty well as usual.

“What the hell, you guys, do you enjoy teasing me that much?”(renji)

“How is this teasing? We aren’t doing anything like that are we, Eru-san?”(toudou)

[Yeah. I’m just giving a report on you, Renji.]

“Stop that, will you?”(renji)

Saying that, I lightly hit her once more.

“Wait, did you tell the same things to Utano-san as well?”(renji)

[If I had, you would be confined inside the castle for sure by now.]

“uwaahh.”

“Stop with the ‘uwaahh’, I’m not laughing, goddamnit.”(renji)

“No, it just sounded so realistic that I...”

“No, no it’s not!”

What the hell is with this ‘confinement’ talk. Even Utano-san wouldn’t go that far. Probably.

“Speaking of yuuko-san, I just recalled something.”(toudou)

“If this is something ridiculous again, I’ll punch you in the face okay?”

“No, no. I wanted to ask if your relationship progressed any more from then.”

The moment he said that, I threw punch at his face. I had only swung it without any proper swing or anything but still he dodged it without even getting grazed by my fist.

“That was close!”(toudou)

“Seriously. You are curious about the weirdest of things.”(renji)

“That doesn’t mean you can punch me, you know?”

“But you dodged didn’t you?”

“Well, obviously.”

“Don’t dodge.”

“No way.”

[.....You guys sure are enjoying this.]

Well, somewhat I guess. After all, I don’t have many people with whom I can fool around like this. Not because he gets my jokes or anything but more because we usually take our jokes way too far. Though those usually end with me getting my life in danger.

Even from sudden attack Toudou wasn’t perturbed at all. Even his walking speed was the same.

My fist must have seemed like coming in slow motion to him. Even though it was a surprise attack. It’s sad how even the non-combatant member of us 13 still possesses that level of physical ability. If I had to fight Masaki-chan who was a fighter to the core, just how much gap in power will be there? I felt gloopy already. Well, to fight her, I have to first win against O’Brien-san though.

“By the way, why go for maid clothes for your employees?”(renji)

“It’s nice isn’t it? That said, they aren’t as in demand in this world as they were in ours.”(toudou)

“Really?”

“Maids are a common thing here after all. Unlike back on earth, it’s not a job filled with hopes and dreams of men.”

“Yeah.”

[Dreams, hopes, in maids??]

“Don’t think too much about it.”(renji)

[??]

Certainly, like Toudou said, maids were common here. Normal people probably won’t hire one but maids working for nobles doing stuff like shopping etc is a common sight. Their job is to serve their master like it was in our world but the maids here are far more polished and refined than the ones in our world in my opinion. Not that I have gone to maid cafes or anything so I wouldn’t really know.

Probably Toudou should be much more knowledgeable in that sense. He has hired maids for his restaurant after all. Well, there’s something about the maid uniform that fascinates you, I agree with that. As a man, I can’t deny it. I could continue complimenting it without restraint if I got a chance. Yup, being a maid is a proper job.

“Where did you get those uniforms from though?”(renji)

“They had spare ones in the castle so I took those.”

I see, that made sense.

Having your employees in uniforms must look better from another person's point of view, not that I have any experience as a shop manager or owner though. That said, it might not be true in this world as well.

Uniforms, as a concept, doesn't really exist in this world. It's more like designing the clothes that are as easy to move in as possible and don't get in the way of your work. He must have thought of properly implementing the uniforms as one of the means to make it interesting for customers.

It's a pretty good approach in my opinion. I guess that also comes from the knowledge of another world? Though he still ended with maid clothes. No matter how seriously you think about it, in the end, he ended with maid clothes. As a man it's not like I don't understand him but maybe he should try changing his focus point a bit.

Or rather, shouldn't he focus more on his own cooking rather than maid clothes? Especially dishes and preparations that don't exist in this world.

I asked him to tell me more about his cooking rather than continue rambling on about maid clothes.

"Well, I have thought of various things." (toudou)

[Wow. I'm surprised.]

".....could you two not sound that surprised?"

As both of us looked at him surprised that he had actually thought about it, Toudou made a sad face. He must be thinking that I was almost sure that he had thought of absolutely nothing before opening his restaurant.

Well, his reaction was amusing so I let it as is. Even though like this, I do respect the guy.

Even while not possessing a fighting ability, he stuck along with us till the very end of our journey. I can still remember him desperately cooking for people crying in burnt villages, with people dying all around.

With his cooking, something we couldn't do, he saved many. I doubt anyone else could do what he did.

No matter how much you think about it, talk about it, till you take action your feelings don't reflect anything. No matter how high the ideals you hold, it's useless if it cannot be seen in your actions.

That's what it's like to truly save people.

That's why, from the bottom of my heart, I respect him. Though he never talks about it.

Having eaten the meat, he twirled and played with the skewer in his hand.

"Well then, I should go to the arena now. What are you going to do Toudou?"(renji)



“It’s already time, eh?”

Saying that, he looked at the sky. It’s because the tournament was set to start when the sun reached its peak. I think only an hour or two remains for that. I need to return, make an appearance and wear that damn heavy armour once more. I felt sluggish just thinking about it. It’s really heavy; that damn armour. Though only because I’m not used to wearing it.

“I’ll come as well. Might as well meet this, Francesca-san was it? Introduce me to her, kay?”(toudou)

“Yeah, sure. Wait, I haven’t already?”(renji)

“No, you haven’t.....”

“We even ate at your restaurant though.”

“She came to my restaurant!?! Why didn’t you introduce me then.....”

“No, well, I thought you’d be busy so I would feel bad to distract you.”

“I think it’d be fine to at least talk for a bit!?”

[Hiiragi, Renji’s only enjoying your reactions you know?]

Hearing Ermenhilde’s suggestion, Toudou slumped his shoulders. Umu, his

reactions definitely are too amusing.

## Chapter 48: Team Battles (2)

I wonder if I am stupid to feel that I have become stronger just by putting on some gauntlet, greaves and armour? Above it, I also put on an extravagant mantle.

As I gave a small thanks to the maid helping me, she bowed to me. I still can't get used to people being so humble towards me.

Maybe my reaction was amusing as Kuuki, who had finished outfitting himself early, was snickering at me.

By the way, nearby, Toudou was going through difficulty trying to put on his armour. His physique had gotten much bigger than one year ago after all. It must feel pretty stiff for him.

Since he was also not used to putting on armour like me, he was in distress along with the maid helping him. While laughing at him, even though I had not been any better, I moved to a different part of the room.

The room given to us for changing was pretty big. Going by the high value furniture kept in the room, this room normally might be used by someone of pretty high status. It would've been fine just to give us some normal room though. Whether it be the high class furniture or the flowers decorated in the room, neither seemed to suit the atmosphere of the Coliseum we were in. not to mention all of this looked extremely costly as well. I'm scared to even touch it.....well not really, but still, I'd rather not get too touchy with it.

“Armour really suits you, Kuuki.”

When I said that, Kuuki scratched his cheek in slight embarrassment.

With a gentle expression and tall height, the magnificent knight armour truly seemed fitting on him. With his red mantle swaying behind him and riding a horse, he'd probably get really popular with the noble girls.

“Rather than saying that it suits me, it's more like I'm simply too used to wearing it all the time.”(kuuki)

“Really?”

“Well I do have to wear the armour almost everyday, all the time, for my work after all.”

Well that's true as well, I guess. As the vice commander of the Knight Order, he spends everyday working as a knight. He's also in a relationship with princess of this country by the way. Looks like he's winning in life. I sound like a jealous man now.

Well, leaving the princess aside, I still think that armour won't suit someone better just by wearing it more. Me and Toudou are examples after all.

I guess anything looks good on those with good looks. Whether it be Kuuki or Souichi, it's like that. These guys, how should I say this, have some kind of aura with them, of a leader, or rather, someone who stands above others. Maybe because they are confident in themselves. They have such an Aura.

[It suits you as well, Renji.]

“Why, thank you.”(renji)

While listening to Ermenhilde, I moved my now much heavier arm around. It's really hard to move in. Must be because I'm not used to it like Kuuki. After I hang the mithril sword on my waist, will I look a bit more like a knight? I tried imagining myself like that.

Yup, doesn't suit at all. Feels more like the extravagant and clothes are great which is why I look fine as well. The armour seems more prominent than myself.

That said, in the end, I have no choice but to be in this outfit for the next few days. I hope I don't get laughed at. If someone laughed while saying that it doesn't suit me, I'll probably break.

“So, what's next for today?”(renji)

“Next, we'll be observing today's matches with the king.”(kuuki)

“That's it?”

“Yup.”

I confirmed today's schedule with Kuuki. It's not like he's my secretary or anything but yet he spoke so smoothly.

But still, observing the team battles with the King, eh? What an uninteresting event, maybe I'm the only one who thinks like that. I'll probably get beheaded if someone heard me say that though.

[fumu. Sounds boring.]

"I know, right?"

Kuuki gave a wry smile as I agreed to the voice in my head. In fact, I'm only interested in the matches that have my friends taking part in.

Ms Francesca, Souichi, Aya are in the same team as well. Other than that, there's just Masaki-chan's team. Except those..... I don't even know who else is taking part even.

A few from the Knight Order seem to have made a team as well but I didn't know any of them well so I wasn't interested. There are teams from various guilds and schools as well but it'll probably be the Knight team that'll win.

Souichi and Masaki-chan's team would also perform well but since this isn't just a knockout tournament, having just one with exception strength won't be sufficient to win.

No matter how strong Souichi or Masaki-chan are, it's useless if they aren't together. 5 vs 5. Out of the 5 rounds, the one who wins 3 wins so in that sense, the adventurers and knights have the advantage as it's their job. The Magic City student team does have both Aya and Souichi but still that's only two rounds. To win another one.....it might be difficult for a student.

“Oh, you’re not very interested in it?”(kuuki)

“Except for the ones that has people I know, no, not really. Honestly speaking, seeing adventurers who I nothing about fight it out seems so.....”(renji)

“Well, I understand what you mean.”

I guess even Kuuki, who agreed with me, found this to be boring as well.

Both Kuuki and me, rather than watch others, prefer to do the job ourselves. And, I have a premonition that I won’t get to watch in peace either. I was gone for a year, I will definitely be asked about what I had been doing. While drinking.

.....the guest seats made for nobles and royalty cannot be seen well from the normal audience seats. They might see our faces but its far enough that let alone see what we’re doing or talking about, they wouldn’t even be able to tell what expression we’re making. That alcohol loving King will do whatever he feels like there.

“Don’t let that show on your face though, okay?”(kuuki)

“Looks like you’ve gotten used to all this as a knight eh?” (renji)

As I gave a small sigh, he gave a small laugh.

Well, it’s not like I don’t like spending time with the king. I love alcohol as well

and I do like King Joshua as well. I can't come to hate anyone who worries about me like that without holding any malice or ill intent behind him. The fact that he gets a bit too casual while going with the jolly festive mood is a bit of a problem though.

"So?"(renji)

"What?"(kuuki)

"Who do you think is gonna win?"

[I am betting on Souichi's team to win.]

"Thanks for the uninteresting answer, Ermenhilde."

[Muu.]

Saying that, I sat down on a nearby chair. Due to the armour it felt really uncomfortable.

But still, it felt really weird to have a maid even pull a chair for me to sit. It seems I really am a commoner to the very core. But without letting such things show on my face, I looked at Kuuki.

Looking towards this tall man, he folded his arms as if he was giving it some thought. Seriously, it's envious how he looks good doing everything. Even the maid appointed to him seemed to be glancing towards him but he didn't seem to notice it. What a sinful man he is.



“I think it’ll be the Knight team. Them or the adventurer team from Tactics city. They are pretty high skilled as compared to the ones here, in the capital.”(kuuki)

“fumu.”

I see as someone working with the Knights, he should be more knowledgeable about such things than me. Must be as he says.

As the name of the Tactics City would suggest, their whole focus is on fighting. That’s because, though there’s the ocean in between, it still is the closest city to Abenelm continent.

Back when the Demon God was still alive, monsters and demons that could fly, and monsters that could cross through water would attack almost daily. As a result, the amount of fighting done there was much more than other cities and automatically the skill level of warriors in there grew higher.

It was the front line of hell. It was more of a defensive establishment and a city in name only. The adventurers and mercenaries that come from there hold much confidence in their skill.

And confidence is the most important thing to have. Without it, you cannot fight and once broken, everything is over. I wonder who was it that said that.

Ermenhilde was betting on Souichi’s team whereas Kuuki was betting on the Knights.

“Renji, who do you think will win?”(kuuki)

“I.....let’s see.”

The most chances of winning are with either Souichi’s team or the knights. The Brave and the Grand Magus. On the other hand we have veteran knights who have fought in the war. In the Knight Order, there are many that come from the Tactics City as well. In terms of composite strength, I think the Knights are the strongest.

But that means I’ll also be taking Kuuki’s side. That won’t be interesting. It’s not like we’re actually gambling but it’s still not much fun if there isn’t much difference in opinions. But that means, the options I have are limited. Or rather, only one is left.

“Then, I am gonna bet on Masaki-chan’s team.”

“Oh wow. You’ll be at quite the disadvantage though?”(kuuki)

“It’s not like we’re actually betting anything after all. It’s a good chance to go for the underdog for once.”

“Eh, we’re not actually betting anything?”

“.....you want to?”

“Let’s make a bet!”

[You two, you're being improper.]

That said, I don't really have anything to bet though. Ermenhilde seemed to be saying something as well but I just ignored her.

I thought of various things I had but nothing's worth selling. Neither do I have anything rare or new.

While sipping the tea made by the maid, Toudou, now finally dressed in armour, also came towards us. As expected, it didn't suit him either, the same as me.

"Good clothes do make the man, eh?"

"I can say that right back at you."

Saying that, we both sighed together. And now we both have to go in front of people in such an unfitting outfit, a sigh was only natural. I'll probably stop minding it once I stop paying attention to it though. But still, at first it does feel embarrassing.

In my head I heard [Don't talk about it if it only makes you more depressed.] but I ignored it.

".....So, what you guys talking about?"(toudou)

"We're betting on which team will win."(kuuki)

“You really like such things don’t you?”

“It’s one of my few pastimes after all. So which one are you betting on?”

I also told him that we chose Souichi, Masaki-chan and the Knight’s team already.

“You guys have already taken the favourites...”

He dropped his shoulders. Well, it’s your fault that you took so much time just to put on armour.

“Before that, what are we betting?”(kuuki)

“It’d be troublesome to bet money though. After the tournament is over, how about a treating dinner?”(renji)

“Sounds nice. Even though we’re all here, we men alone haven’t gone together even once.”(kuuki)

“Yeah. A treat at Toudou’s restaurant.”

“Wait a sec.....doesn’t that mean I’ll have to prepare the place, food and labour?”(toudou)

“It’d be fine if you won the bet though, right?”

“A team with the brave and the knights..... all flags point to me losing!”(toudou)

“It’ll be fine.”

“How?! On what basis!?!”(toudou)

*Kakaka* as I laughed, Toudou made a pathetic sound.

But, oh well,

“The food you make is just too tasty. I want to eat together with everyone. We won’t have to be too considerate with just men as well, after all.”(renji)

“Yamada-san.....”

“I just to want to chat and fool around while eating, Toudou.”

“.....Well, I guess it’s not like it’s decided I’ll lose for sure either.”

Saying that, Toudou gave a happy smile. What a soft guy.

Well, I wasn’t lying either though. That said, it’s still funny to see him accept it so easily. It’s different way of teasing than what I do to Ermenhilde.

Kuuki was also grinning while looking at us talk. I wonder what they were thinking as the maids in the room gave a bow and quietly left the room. Let

alone footsteps, there was not even the sound of door closing. As if showing off the skills of a true maid. Above all, they could even read the mood. I wish a certain medal would learn that as well.

“fuu, maids sure are tiring to have around.”

“How can you say that when you have multiple ones working at your restaurant?”

“Those are just acting like maids. They’re not actual ones. In the first place, real maids won’t work as waitresses at a restaurant I think.”

“Well, that’s true.”

“Oh right, you had made the spare dresses you took into the uniform of your restaurant, right Toudou-san?”(kuuki)

According to what Kuuki said, the clothes Toudou got are the same as the ones worn by the castle maids.

It seems he requested the head maid for the spare ones that might be left. Recalling her face that has helped me quite a lot of times, it’s amazing how Toudou was able to say that directly to her.

With long brown hair tied-up, the Head Maid is beauty with an aura of perfection around her. Hearing that might make you think that I’d lust after her but she’s actually very strict and formal. She wants perfectness from all type of work, or rather, is too hard headed. I don’t think she has ever cut corners in her life. Anyway, she’s just strict. And very scary. Except for what’s necessary, the

fact that she doesn't even talk when at work is apparently famous with the other maids.

It's amazing how he was able to say something like 'please give the spare maid clothes to me' directly to her.

"She's not actually that scary you know? Normally, in private, she's a pretty interesting person."(toudou)

Is what Toudou says. I didn't hear much but apparently she's completely different from what we have see. I can't even imagine her like that.

Or rather seeing how happily toudou is talking about her, it might give the wrong idea to her children about Toudou and her relationship. Or maybe I'm just a dirty adult?

I tried asking him but he dodged the topic. Or rather, Toudou is not good at lying. It probably is not like that.

Tch, how uninteresting.

"Just when I thought that finally spring has come for Toudou as well....."(renji)

"I doubt spring would ever come for someone like me though."(toudou)

"Self-depriciating as usual, eh? I don't think you're as unpopular as you make it to, you know?"(kuuki)

“Stop lying.”(toudou)

As usual he's lacking in confidence about his looks, even denying Kuuki's words with a smile. Short height and fat body. I guess his complex won't go away in an year.

In though, even I think that Toudou actually might have some popularity. Not for his looks but his personality. And, he does have the accomplishment of having subjugated the Demon God as well. Though he might not be getting buried in women like Kuuki and Souichi, I pretty sure there might be women who support Toudou.

But, I do understand how Toudou feels. If you have the almost beautiful brave and the attractive and tall knight beside you, anyone would get a complex about their looks. And Toudou was above all, a hikikomori, or rather , a NEET back in our world. A person who didn't have any confidence in his looks and shut himself up in his room.

Though he ended up with no choice but to be outside after getting summoned to another world, that won't remove his complex about his looks so easily. We are laughing about it right now but back then just the mention of fat or short height would get over excessive reaction from him. Well, I guess he has matured enough to be able to make fun of his own looks.

“You'll also be 26 this year right? Shouldn't you search for good partner already?”(renji)

“You're also telling me that now.....”



“Also?”

That’s as if someone else has said that as well. Looking at Kuuki, he gave a troubled nod.

“Me aside, Toudou-san, Takashi-kun, Koutarou-kun are all saviours of the world yet unmarried men.”(kuuki)

“Ohh.”

“Nobles have a way of constantly introducing their daughters to them it seems.”

“Just a while ago, they said that Kuuki-kun was the one who introduced us though.”(toudou)

“I feel bad about it. But I’m nothing more than a knight. I have no choice but to answer to nobles’ expectations.”

“Toudou and Koutarou aside, even Itou is involved.....?”(renji)

“He’s pretty popular you know? This world sees strength as the main charm point after all.”

“waah.”

Toudou gave a sigh at that. Don't worry. At least you're stronger than me.

That aside, Itou eh? Itou Takashi, he's a hero that's able to use any weapon perfectly enough to be called as the [Weapon King].

I don't hear much rumours about him but from what I've heard here and there, he seems to be working as a mercenary hunting monsters. Even from back then, he's always been the type that enjoys battles after all.

Given his ability as well, to Itou Takashi, battlegrounds must seem like the best place to make use of it. I'm not him so I can't say for sure though. After all, I only fight when absolutely necessary.

Because he has such a personality, he might have become pretty popular with the ladies of this world. With the fight against the Demon God and the constant threat of monsters and demons, fighting for life and death has become a major part of the people of this world. Thus someone like Itou must seem like a reassuring person to them.

"It's like that for Toudou-san and Takashi-kun but what about Yamada-san?"  
(kuuki)

"Even if you ask me that, I'm fine as it is."

I lightly swung my gauntlet wearing right arm. A dull sound reached my ears as it moved.

"That's right rather me, Yamada-san's case is more important."(toudou)

“Got all your energy back already you bastard.....”(renji)

“A while ago, I lent a maid uniform to Utano-san a while ago, care to explain what’s that about?”

“Like I know!”

[?? Does Yuuko have any need for Maid clothes? With her personality I doubt she’d wear it though.]

“It’s because her personality is like that, that’s its nice! Eru-san, you just don’t get it.”(toudou)

[fumu.]

“Don’t think too much about it. His stupidity will infect you as well.”

“Why so rude suddenly?”

“You asked for it, idiot.”

Koutarou and Kudou are more than enough to teach Ermenhilde weird things.

“Maid clothes?”(kuuki)

“Well, I have no idea what that was about though.”(toudou)

“How envious.”(kuuki)

“From my point of view, you and your passionate love with the princess is more envious though.”(renji)

“Can you say that in front of Yuuko-san and Aya-chan?”(kuuki)

“Unfortunately, I don’t intend to commit suicide.”(renji)

And right now, I don’t have enough youthful emotions to be wondering about who I’ve got a crush on either.

[Your lust for women hasn’t changed at all, Renji.]

“Stop saying it like that will you? People will get the wrong idea.”

[But its not a false. In fact—]

Inside my head, Ermenhilde’s scolding resounded in my head. But that was only about the recent cases. About the girl from the village I saved from the Ogre, Ms Francesca, Mururu. It hurts my ears.

As I made excuses, it was a natural thing to do as a man and I can say with pride that I feel only very slight guilt about it all. That said, it’s not like my excuses would work. If Utano-san heard this, I’ll be done for. Definitely.

“Oh right, this time, Renji-san’s disciple is also taking part right?”(kuuki)

“Disciple?”(renji)

“Yamada-san’s?”(toudou)

Hearing something as weird as that, both me and Toudou ended up asking that again. Toudou aside, was me sounding also confused a surprise as Kuuki’s expression seemed to become a bit troubled for a second.

Toudou also looked at me. Don’t give me that look, will you?

I have not heard anything about this disciple. The only one who I could think of was Aya. Is it her? Since I taught her that pitfall magic.....or rather, even that we thought of it together, that’s it. We’re comrades not master and disciple. Kuuki knew that as well so he won’t speak like that.

Then the only other option was.

“Is it Ms Francesca?”(renji)

“Ohh. The one travelling with Yamada-san?”

“Yeah. It’s quite famous actually. Taking part in the main tournament as a student and a beauty on top. Above all, she’s travelling with the [Hero] Yamada Renji.”(kuuki)

“Well that’s.....it just happened to become a topic like that. And she’s just travelling with me and is not some disciple of mine either.”

“I see.”

“I haven’t even taught her anything that might make her my disciple and also, I’m not a [Hero].”

Not to mention, we’ve travelled together for only a few months. What a blown up rumour it has become.

I feel bad for Ms Francesca. Getting attention like that also means that people will be on guard against her. Now, her opponents won’t let their guard down thinking they’re against a student.

“Well, I guess with her looks and fighting skill, she’d get under attention anyway.”

If she can’t make use of openings, she’ll just have to use brute force. If she wants to leave with a good result, that might be better.....now then, I wonder how far will she be able to win and rise.

Though her being called my disciple still feels weird, I still want her to win as much as possible.

“So you’re travelling with a beauty again? How envious.....”(toudou)

“Want to come and travel with me? It’ll be a good diet for you as well.”(renji)

“A diet while risking my life? I’ll get pretty thin.”

“You did get somewhat thinner back then as well after all.”

“I did, but almost died so many times as well.”

While we were chatting, the door was knocked.

After a moment was let pass, the maid who was serving Kuuki entered the room.

Since the preparations were finished we were being called to the Coliseum and we left the room being led by the maid.

“I feel nervous.”(renji)

“I should be the one to feel nervous. My armour doesn’t look weird right?”(toudou)

“It’s fine, it’s fine. It suits you, It suits you”

“How irresponsible!?!”

[Be quiet all of you. How embarrassing.....]

While walking down the stone corridor, I looked outside the window.

The bright clear sky seemed to indicate the weather for today. Toudou's nervous voice and Kuuki's laughs resounded along with the dry sound made by the swords, hanging on our waists, as we walked.

Blue sky and white clouds. In the sunlight, the greenery shone brightly and the birds flew in the air. It's perfect climate for the tournament. With the energy and enthusiasm of the spectators and the vigour of the participants is bound to make things heat up even in this winter.

Yes, it's clear enough to give me premonitions.

Souichi, Aya, Masaki-chan, Ms Francesca.

A smile rose on my face.

Give your best. Words that won't reach them here, I spoke inside my mind.



## Chapter 49: Team Battles (3)

As we finally reached the spectator seats meant for nobles and royalty, Utano-san, Kudou and Yui-chan were already there sitting on a sofa waiting for us.

The first thing that came to my mind was that this place was bigger than I thought. It was big enough to comfortably seat at least 20 people and there were 4 round shaped tables surrounded by the comfy sofas. On the top of the table, pretty flowers were kept as decoration over a high quality and expensive looking tablecloth. I am guessing the table itself should be super expensive as well.

All of this gave off such an elegant aura that it was impossible to believe that we were still inside the Coliseum. That said it wasn't overdone that could make someone feel almost nervous around it. You could relax and spectate the matches. Though it might vary from how you looked at it, but I felt that you could really feel the consideration put in the construction of this room.

"You look pretty good in the armour."(utano)

"Why, thank you. Utano-san as well, the dress really suits you."(renji)

"Thanks. I'll take that as flattery."

"No, I really meant it though."

As I gave a shrug, Utano-san gave a small laugh. She seemed a bit nervous as her actions felt slightly stiff. Well, if she could still laugh from just some light talk like that, she should be fine.

Utano-san was currently in a black 'long torso' type of dress. I don't remember the origin behind that name but I recall being told that that was what such dresses were called.

Putting prominence on her tall height and beautiful neck, the design gave her a dignified look and atmosphere. Because she has such a slender body, the dress is able to make her look so beautiful.

Black, was also a colour that suited her perfectly. That's just my opinion though.

"Ara, you really are looking pretty good actually."(kudou)

"Thanks. You're not looking bad either Kudou."(renji)

"Is that so?"

Kudou who said that was wearing a mermaid line dress. I'm not sure if I recalled the dress name correctly though. The upper part of the dress emphasized her bountiful chest and her surprisingly thin neck line, and the lower portion was hidden with a long skirt that touched the floor. The skirt part looked like the tail of a mermaid which is where the name of the dress comes from I think. The name's probably different in this world though. After all, mermaids are enemies to the human race after all. They charm people with their beautiful singing and then drown them by leading them to the sea. And

after that, they devour on the flesh of their prey. Even their appearance isn't anywhere as beautiful as what we see in stories. On their upper body, at the nape of their neck and abdomen, they have gills and their faces were a grotesque mixture of the face of a fish and a human. In the end, fantasy will always be fantasy. Reality was harsh. How many times have I cried at such a reality.....

It's a pity that Kudou's beautiful legs were hidden but it still really suits her. And also, maybe because she's wearing a dress, her face showed a much more lively expression than usual. All said and done, she was a woman as well. She must be feeling nice while wearing a good dress as well, I guess.

"u, um....."

As if being hidden behind Utano-san and Kudou, the girl in the white dress raised her small voice as well.

Her normal tied hair had been undone and were hanging behind her back in a proper combed and arranged manner. Normally she had a more childish look but by doing just that much, she looked a lot more mature.

Her dress, as suitable for her age, was perfectly fitting her slight chest and short neck. The skirt portion was, unlike Utano-san and Kudou's, had a bold slit that showed her beautiful leg line. Her outfit truly showed both her cuteness and maturity well.

Honestly, it really suits her. White hair matching her white dress and ruby-like red eyes. And with an expression that held shyness and slight lack of confidence in herself. Truly, that 'gap' between her looks and personality was very Yui-chan like.

“Yui-chan as well, you’re looking good.”(renji)

“Ah, re.....really?”

“yeah.”

What is this? Rather than feeling charmed or being attracted, I feel so deeply moved inside my heart.

Is this what being a parent feels like? Or was this something different?

By the way, behind her, as if it was normal, a knight in black armour—KNIGHT was standing guard. He truly looks like a knight but alongside a beauty in a dress, somehow the scene looked bizarre, or rather, way too prominent. He has such overwhelming presence.

While we were looking at these three, the maid that led us here had quietly moved to the inner portion of the room.

Many other maids were standing in wait there as well, probably the ones who led Utano-san and others here. Beside them, there was also teacups and a pot kept. Probably meant to serve it to us while we watch the tournament.

“Ooh.”(toudou)

“Oh? All three of you look pretty today.”(kuuki)

Toudou and Kuuki who came after me spoke as if surprised. Especially Toudou had lost his words looking at them and had gone stiff. I poked him with my elbow as my gauntlet and armour made a dull sound.

“Thanks for the flattery, Kuuki-kun.”

“No no, it really does suit you, Kudou-san.”(kuuki)

“I see. You look great in the armour as well.”(kudou)

“Thank you very much.”

“You as well, Toudou-kun.”

“Th, thanks.....”(toudou)

“.....What are you getting all flustered for after all this time?”(kudou)

Saying that, Kudou pulled her chest portion of her dress slightly. It almost made the upper portion of her chest almost visible. Kuuki, very casually and Toudou in a panic, quickly averted their gazes.

Their reactions must have been amusing to her as while grinning, Kudou quickly moved towards Toudou and began teasing him.

Utano-san who was sitting beside her made a fed up face at that. The fact

that she didn't get angry shows how used she has become to Kudou's antics as well. Back then though she didn't say it out loud, it clearly showed on her expression how angry she got with her.

As usual, Kudou really enjoys teasing men.

Kuuki, who was used to her as well, gave a wry smile while making sure that his gaze doesn't go to her chest. Well I guess he can't help it. If the princess saw him at that, he'll have a hard time getting the princess back in good mood. Right now, there were even maids standing behind us. Who knows what info might leak?

Beside him, Toudou, who had no immunity to women was getting embarrassed while getting red faced. That reaction is exactly what Kudou enjoys you know.....Well, I'm enjoying this as well so whatever.

The blue dress was tightly stuck to her body making her attractive curves further stand out. With all the portions that exposed her skin well, it was truly an outfit that brought the best out of Kudou Rin's charm.

And that top class dress was currently getting spoiled just to make fun of Toudou. What a waste. She really is such a free bird. Just how costly was that dress I wonder? By the time she's done pulling and stretching it around, I feel like its value will drop greatly though.

While I was thinking of such things, my gaze met with Yui-chan who was sitting beside Utano-san. She seemed like she wanted to say something but stopped herself from doing so.

“You’ve got the eyes of a lecher.”(ana)

Instead the one who spoke was the foul mouthed queen who had not been here till now.

I was just wondering how she’s not by Yui-chan’s side. She must have been floating above looking at the Coliseum from the sky I guess. She came in from the window space meant for us to see the arena from. She was in her usual pure white one piece dress. Since right now every woman was in a dress, she seemed to fit along with each other normally.

“That’s not true.”(renji)

“I wonder. It looked to me like that considering your expression though.”(ana)

Being told that, instinctively my hand went to touch my face. The gauntlet felt really cold.

“Really?”(renji)

“Seriously. Even though there’s such a cute girl in front of you, how can you be looking somewhere else, right Yui?”(ana)

“eh, m, me!?!”

“What do you think Renji, she’s cute right?”(ana)

“Well I definitely agree to that.”(renji)

When I said that, Yui-chan bent down her head with a shy red face. Her reaction as well, looked really cute.

As a normal man, it's only normal to feel like teasing her a bit.

“Yui-chan is definitely cute.”(renji)

I said it purposefully in a way that put importance on ‘Yui-chan being the ONLY cute one’. Of course while looking at Anastasia.

Anasatsia must have instantly caught on to what I was thinking as her smile looked like it cramped. Ignoring her, I turned towards utano-san.

“Where's King Joshua and others?”(renji)

“Still preparing. They need to pay attention to their appearances far more than even us after all.”

“I see.”

Saying that, I sat down in front of Utano-san, opposite the table.

When I did, without even saying anything, a maid came and poured tea for me.



“Oh, is it fine to sit in front of me?”(utano)

“hm?”

“You seemed quite interested in looking at Rin’s chest though?”(utano)

What the hell?

It’s not like she actually took Anastasia’s words seriously but still I ended up giving a wry smile at that.

“Not really. Not in Kudou’s at least..”(renji)

“Oh really? She’s quite the beauty even from my perspective. Also, she’s got pretty big boobs as well.”(ana)

Anastasia, once again, entered mine and Utano-san’s conversation. It’s because this idiot said something weird that Utano-san might misunderstand something. Well, rather than saying she’s misunderstanding, she’s more like teasing me though. While thinking of that, I looked at Anastasia, sitting at her usual place—Yui-chan’s shoulder. That aside, is it okay for a queen to be speaking things like ‘boobs’ so loudly? Am I still fantasizing to hope that a queen would have atleast a bit more decency ?

Even though she has the looks of a beautiful western doll, her mouth completely ruins all the dignity, or rather, her appearance as a queen.

“Mou, Ana you..”(yui)

“You just have small ones, that’s all.”(renji)

“shaddup!”(ana)

When I said that, she showed her teeth as if trying to threaten me.....wasn’t scary at all though.

It might be weird to expect that from a small creature like a fairy though. Well, worst case, she’d make her look bigger with magic. It’d be such a waste of magical energy though.

[That aside, how long till the tournament starts?”]

“The king isn’t even here yet.”(renji)

[Muu.]

Surprisingly, Ermenhilde, who had kept quiet till now spoke up sounding bored.

“Oh, you were there as well? You were so quiet I thought you weren’t here.”(ana)

[I’m not noisy and irritating unlike certain someone.]

“What’s wrong with being lively? It’s more fun that way.”(ana)

[There's a difference between being lively and being a nuisance. Isn't that so, Renji?]

"Really, Renji?"(ana)

Why bring that talk to me? While giving a sigh, I took a sip from the tea poured by the maid. Aah, how tasty.

"Well then,"

These two.....Ignoring what they were asking completely, I stood up.

The spectator seat we were in were created higher than the normal ones so one could look down on all other seats along with the arena.

It was a full house in the coliseum. Men and women of all ages, were excitedly waiting for the tournament to begin.

I'm sure somewhere in there, Feirona, Mururu and maybe even Solnea were sitting as well. I tried to make an oblique search but as expected, I couldn't find them among such a big crowd.

I wonder what they were thinking as Ermenhilde and Anastasia both remained silent. It felt kind of awkward.

"Are you looking for someone?"

“Hmm, not really.”

Maybe she found it amusing or was just curious, Utano-san asked me while I looked down towards the audience.

Turning back at her question, I shook my head saying it was nothing.

“Was just thinking about how big the crowd was.”(renji)

“Well, obviously. The heroes that defeated the Demon God are supposed to have taken part in the tournament after all.”(utano)

“It’s not like we’re any different than normal people deep inside though.”

“But still, they wish for us. To act as Heroes.”

“Yeah, I know.”

“Yes, indeed.”

We’re just normal humans. We have received the divine protection of Astraera but deep inside we’re not any different from others.

But still, the fact that we subjugated the Demon God makes us into the hope for all the people of this world.

That's why, they will wish of us. To stand and act as Heroes.

As their hope, as absolute existences, as the light that would never fade.....to remain invincible, as the perfect idol.

"Well, if they get this fired up, I can't show them a disappointing loss now can I?"(renji)

"Exactly. Be sure to work hard, okay?"(utano)

"I'll try my best at least."

When I said that, just slightly.....for a second only, her right arm touched mine.

"To entertain them, I got Souichi and the others to give their best. You'll work hard tomorrow as well right?"(utano)

"Yeah, yeah."

"No need to say it twice. You're not a kid."

As I sat down on the sofa together with Utano-san, this time Yui-chan came and sat beside me. Even though there's so many more seats, why here? Curious, I looked at her as she looked up towards me with her ruby red eyes. It was the so called 'upturned eyes/ puppy eyes'.

She feels like a little sister or rather, like a daughter. It felt a bit embarrassing to be looked at by her like that.

“Can I....sit, beside you?”(yui)

“Hm, sure but my armour will feel really cold you know?”(renji)

“Eh, really, that’s what you ask?”(ana)

“No, but, it really is very cold. My armour, that is.”(renji)

Hearing Anastasia’s tsukkomi, I ended up replying like that.

Even if it is a resistant to magic, mithril armour, it’s still armour. Metal is metal. It’s surface will always feel cold.

I thought that way but Yui-chan didn’t seem to mind it as she simply shook her head.

“As usual, you two get along well.”(utano)

“Oh, jealous?”(renji)

“Yup.”(utano)

Utano-san sitting in front said that and I felt like Yui-chan’s porcelain white skin turned a bit red.

Utano-san as well, wasn't making her stern expression as usual and was giving a smile so the atmosphere felt really strange.

Both me and Anastasia didn't know how to react to them.

Well.....

"What happened Yui-chan, your face looks red."(renji)

"Ah, no....."

I should just have fun and tease her as usual.

But when I did, I knew it. The pressure from the phantom knight standing behind us increased. He's overprotective as usual. Anastasia was just snickering while on Yui-chan's shoulder. If possible, it'd be great if you could make him stop with that pressure though. Though a comrade, KNIGHT was a phantom. And when a phantom increases his pressure, the chill you feel is harsher than even coldest days of winter. The fact that he doesn't talk at all only adds to the effect.

Well, that's fun in its own way. Or rather, the correct way should be to say that it feels nostalgic. As expected, it's fun to fool around like this with your comrades.

"aah, that sucked."(toudou)

“Isn’t that rude, Toudou-kun?”(kudou)

“Nope, not at all.”

While I was talking with Utano-san and Yui-chan. Toudou, with a tired sounding voice, came here.

They must have thought they’d overcrowd the table as the three of them, Kudou, Kuuki and Toudou, sat down by another table.

Just then, King Joshua in an extravagant dress while being escorted by Warren-san and O’Brien-san came into the room as well.

It’d be rude to act in a panic so we quietly stood up and were about to kneel when King Joshua stopped us with a wave of his hand.

“You don’t need to. That aside, it’s nice to see you all gathered like this again.”(king)

“No, our livelihoods are also supported by the country. It’s only normal to answer to the King’s calls.”(utano)

When Utano-san said that, King Joshua gave a wide smile.

“I see. For you to say that, it makes me happy as well.”(king)

Saying that, he sat down on the most luxurious looking sofa.



Just like KNIGHT stood behind Yui-chan, O'brien-san stood behind the king. Warren-san sat down in one of the side sofas adjoining the table in front of the King.

And having sat down, King Joshua gave a meaningful look towards me. He must be asking me to come to his table.

Seeing the maid prepare a very different liquid kept in a glass bottle other than tea inside made my face cramp a bit.

“Utano-san?”(renji)

“You’re the one being called, have fun.”(utano)

How cold. Over there, I saw Kudou shake her shoulder in laughter. I am definitely going to make them pay for this. That said, I feel like she’d end up trapping me instead though. Well, that might be fun as well. Probably.

Thinking that, I headed towards king Joshua and sat down on the sofa in front of him.

It feels quite luxurious to sit on such a sofa alone.

“That armour suits you well.”(king)

“You were the ones who prepared it for me though?”(renji)

“fu, I suppose so. I am glad that your body hasn’t changed much since it had been made from your earlier measurements.”

As King Joshua gave a laugh, o’Brien-san behind him also nodded and smiled. Just like Utano-san, seeing him with such an expression was also rare.

Well, it’s normal that my body didn’t change much. It’s not like I had been eating some high calorie delicious food everyday or something and I did move around my body almost everyday. I doubt I’d get fat....probably.

“My lord as well, your attire suits you well.”(renji)

“I wonder. I have spent the last whole year doing nothing but sit on a chair you know?”

Saying that, he lightly patted his stomach. He must be implying that he has gained excess fat I guess.

He gave a *kaka* laugh. His laugh sounded really energetic making me feel pleasant as well.

“Renji-dono.”

“What is it, Warren-dono.”(renji)

“To have taken part in the tournament this time, I truly thank you for the bottom of my heart.”

“No, well.....”

The reason I did was because of my debt to Utano-san. But I should keep my mouth shut about that. The reason is too embarrassing after all.

“Seriously. Why are you two so formal. At least relax a bit at times like these, will you?”(king)

“Even if say that milord,”(warren)

“It’s not like we’re completely in private either.”

When both me and Warren-san spoke together, King Joshua gave a sigh while giving a shrug.

His reaction was amusing so even O’Brien-san gave a small laugh.

Seriously, this king is too casual I think.

“Sorry for the wait.”

“oh.....”

Inside the calm atmosphere, a dignified voice resounded.

From the door the king had come, the owner of this voice also entered.

With long silver hair and a petite body and slightly short height; even her usual cute appearance looked dignified when coupled with the makeup, attire and her calm and gentle gaze.

Hou, I breathed out.

Beautiful. Her jewel like beauty from one year ago was still there and it has only become greater as she grew up it seems.

I did see her a few days back at the cathedral as well but seeing her closely like this, it's much easier to tell.

How should I say this.....certainly, she could charm anyone.

[Renji?]

"No, it's nothing."

"kuku, what, Renji, did you get charmed by Amalda?"(king)

"As if. It's nothing like that."

Let's not talk about it shall we, King.

The princess's calm expression changed and gave a smile instantly on hearing

her father's chatter. That expression was definitely one of the princess from an year ago. I guess a person's core won't change that easily.

And, somewhere, she has become more like her mother—the queen. That person also had a warm and gentle face of a mother who cared and loved her family and country underneath her dignified expression.

That made me feel happy as well as I gave a slight smile.

“What do you think, want to marry my——”(king)

“No thanks.”(renji)

“Father?”(amalda)

My rejection and the princess's voice came at the same time.

Though the offer was very attractive, I'll get killed by Kuuki as removal of competition. Without fail.

And above all, I don't plan on being a obstacle in a comrade's romance.

——I always want my comrades to be happy.

And the title of a Hero is alone is heavy enough, marrying her and becoming the next king is something I cannot handle. There's no chance.

Even the princess's gaze came at me only for a second and was now fixed towards Kuuki, who was talking with Utano-san and others. Unlike her dignified expression from before, it held warmth. Truly like that of a girl in love. Something like that. Why am I not looked at like that by anyone, Goddamnit. Seeing her expression, even the King gave a sigh. I totally feel you.

The fact that she hadn't walked towards him already shows that at least she understands her position as royalty. Or maybe she's just embarrassed to flirt in front of so many people.

If Yui-chan gave that kind of look to someone, I will join up with KNIGHT and Fafnir and make that man undergo the most stressful interview of his life.

"Now then, it looks like everyone has gathered."(renji)

"umu, so it seems."(king)

With his words, before the King rose, I stood up and stood in line with O'brien-san. With the king in the centre, O'brien-san was to his right and I at his left.

As the mithril sword on my waist made a *kacha* sound as I moved, O'brien-san made a clear smile.

"Looks like the expression on your face has become better again."(ob)

"Is that so?"

Without a mirror, I can't really tell that though. But if he says so, it must be true.

Behind me was Utano-san and beside her was Kudou and the others. Beside O'brien-san stood Kuuki and Warren-san, Yui-chan and KNIGHT.

"Well then, we shouldn't make the people wait any longer."(king)

"And the participants either, father."(amalda)

At the very front stood the King and the princess. Normally, the queen should stand by the King's side but that person lost her life in the war one year ago.

.....it's amazing how these two have overcome that sadness.

Both the king and the princess.

Even though, even after one year, I am still getting pulled down by it.

As the King and the princess reached to the edge of the balcony, the whole Coliseum slowly went silent.

"Everyone——"(king)

And thus, the voice amplified by magic resounded in all of the Coliseum

And the festival began.

## Interlude 5

(Francesca POV)

As I sat down on the seat provided in the waiting room, I gave a sigh.

My stomach felt slightly heavy having just eaten lunch but that'll soon be digested after I move around in the tournament.

Compared to when it began, the number of participants had already become half of what it was and the remaining contestants were talking to their comrades freely right now. There was not a single team another than us who was wearing a school uniform anymore.

Among the two waiting rooms prepared for the contestants, the other one was being used by the only other student team, other than us, left in the tournament. The [Demonic Sword User] Masaki-sama's team from Tactics city.

"But still, it was great to know that both Souichi-sama and Aya-sama were such light-hearted people right?"

The one who said that was one of the girls, younger than me, in our team.

With small face and stature, she looked cute with her short golden hair tied with a red ribbon. She looked more childish than Aya-san, who was also an year younger than me, but still she had her own charm.



What she was talking about were the words spoken to us today when all of us were in the room.

‘We don’t like being referred to with ‘-sama’ suffix so at least try to stick to ‘-san’.’

“Yeah, for people who hold the title of Heroes, they even readily listened to our thoughts and opinions as well.”

The one replied was also a girl of our team—and the same age as me.

With bright red hair and confident looking eyes, her expression was filled with confidence. She had a charm I didn’t possess.

She was also only slightly shorter than me, still pretty tall for a girl. Even her uniform that she wore perfectly at school, since no one was here to reprimand her, her chest button was more open than normal. I thought that she was a serious type of person but I guess this is more of her natural personality.

“I was really surprised.....that both of them were so lax with formality and stuff like that.”

“Yeah. I always thought that they’d have a more strict personality. What do you think, Francesca?”

Having the topic suddenly turned towards me, I got surprised since I was only listening to their chat in a daze. My reaction must have looked funny as both gave a giggle.

“Looks like you’ve really worked hard today, senpai.”

“Well, all said and done, she did win in her battles in both the first round match and the second round match. You were really amazing.”

“Really, I was totally surprised.”

“.....I think the opponent just let their guard down against me though.”(fran)

“Even still, that was great.”

To those that knew of my scores at school, their feelings must be more complicated than just pure surprise. A big part of nobles put great importance on status and ratings. Tournaments like these have a great impact on graduation scores and even the ratings of the whole family so many are aiming for wins in it. Though victory alone won’t raise your grades but for her who must have been aiming for a good evaluation yet lost must not find this amusing.

The younger girl though, seemed to be genuinely surprised.

Magician wasn’t a job that fights one on one. That is taught while at school and a fact that I learnt while travelling as well.

We need to be protected while prepare to fire our magic and when you run out of magical energy, you’re useless. Though we have many weaknesses, once the magic becomes active, we can fight with immense strength.

Though we need to be protected, we surpass knights or soldiers in terms of firepower. Quite an extreme existence if I were to say so myself.

And for both of them who were stereotypical magicians, they got defeated before they could activate their magic.

Even though they did learn for such times, it's still difficult to beat someone who can fight normally without protection. As a matter of fact, though I have no learnt how to use the sword, but the first time I left on a journey I was almost killed by goblins. These two might be fortunate that at least there's no danger to their lives here.

"So were you taught how to fight one on one by someone?"

"Ah, no. Not really....."

"Really?"

"Yes."

It was true so I could look straight in her eyes and nod. The red haired girl was asking about if during my travels.....was I taught by Renji-sama.

But in truth, I only travelled with him and the only thing he taught me was the basics of journeying and how to apply them.....as for being taught something, there was just that pitfall magic and its importance. Also, he explained about the ecology of monsters.

The reason I was able to win like this was due to my experience with fighting monsters.

Monsters were far stronger and faster than normal humans. And for the past half month, I have been constantly facing such opponents. That and my opponents must have let their guard down thinking they were facing just a student. I don't if I can win one more time.

“After all, you were travelling with the [Hero] right? Did he teach you something special or something.....”

“Special.....that's the last kind of thing that person would focus on.”(fran)

Renji-sama puts the most importance on fighting using his own experience as the focus. Countless, innumerable times, he has fought against monsters, killed and valued the experience of living through that fight.

And because Renji-sama is like that, by travelling with him and watching him, I learnt things that would be useful to me. I learnt various things like habits and specialities of monsters as well.

He never talks about it but I think that he might be more knowledgeable about the monsters and their ecology than even Feirona-san and Mururu-chan. He himself said that he had spent lots of time learning such things.

All said and done, no matter how much talent you have, no matter what kind of power you may have received from the goddess, he believes that learning is the still the most important thing.

But, well, he is special in his own way. He does possess the special weapon called Ermenhilde-sama.

“Is that so?”

“Yes. After talking I learnt that he’s actually quite the friendly person. He didn’t abandon an amateur like me after all.”(fran)

“hmmm..”

The topic had changed from Souichi-san and Aya-san at some point but if they’re willing to continue conversing, I don’t mind.

For some reason, after it was known that I was travelling with Renji-sama, somehow they became more distant around me. Even though it was pure luck that I met him.

“Oh right, Renji-sama even said the same thing as Souichi-san as well.”(fran)

“Same thing?”

“What did he say?”

“To not use ‘-sama’ while calling him.”(fran)

When I told them that, both made a surprised sound in a loud voice. But the

next moment, they quickly looked at the other participants standing nearby and quickly shut their mouths while blushing in embarrassment.

Was it really that strange? But I feel like I was equally surprised when I heard this the first time.

After talking for a while, becoming tired of talking we took a breather.

“But all said and done, we ended up advancing far more than expected.”

The older girl muttered that.

We cleared through 2 rounds.

It was so anticlimactic that we couldn't really truly feel that it was true. It's because unlike us students, we were fighting together with those two who were in a whole different level.

Souichi-san and Aya-san.

They were very carefree and easy to talk to but, as holders of the title of heroes who saved the world, the difference in our abilities was clear.

After fighting desperately, we won just barely but those two won without even coming slightly in danger. Even against, older and experienced adventurers, that didn't change.

“I could brag to my friends about this.”

“fufu, that’s true.”

The red haired girl spoke so happily. It must be because normally students are all eliminated in the first round of the tournament.

Well, it would have been the same if not for those two.

“That aside, Francesca, do you intend to use that sword in the next battle as well?”

Saying that her gaze pointed towards the short sword hanging on my waist.

“Yes, I plan to, why?”(fran)

Was there a problem?

I tilted my head in confusion not understanding what she meant when the girl gave a sigh and the younger girl gave a wry smile.

“umm.....is there something wrong with my sword?”(fran)

“After all, that’s just an iron sword right?”

“Well, yes.”

When I said that, they gave another sigh.

“The tournament is such a rare occasion. Shouldn’t you be using a better sword? C’mon, want to go but a new one right now?”

“Ah.”

“That’s right, senpai. If you have a stronger sword, you’d be able to perform even better.”

I wonder about that.

They’re probably speaking with good intentions but I doubt my result would change, whether good or bad, even if I bought a new sword right now.

“It’s because I’m used to using this one.”(fran)

“That one?”

“Yes.”

I do, though only somewhat, understand what they want to say. It might seem weird for someone taking part in the tournament to be using such a common sword.

But still, it’s the sword I have been using from the time I first started



travelling. I am attached to it and also accustomed to it as well. Even if I got a new sword right now, I doubt I'll be able to use it as well as this short sword.

While feeling their gazes, I gently patted the handle of my sword. When I do, somehow, I feel more courageous.

"You should use a magic enchanted or a sword made with better materials at least. Like a student of the Academy would."

"Haa."(fran)

Being told that I couldn't say anything.

A magicians weapon is a staff/wand. It acts as a catalyst when using magic and can also be used as a blunt weapon when needed. Even Aya-san normally uses a wooden staff with skill.

Even though she was enhancing her physical abilities with magic, she could still beat a veteran adventurer with just a wooden staff. Until now she hasn't had an opponent that required the use of actual magic but I could still imagine how she'd look fighting through the battlefield. That's what a true magician should be like.

But was I wrong to use a sword instead of a staff? If this sword was buffed with magic or a mithril sword, it'd still be okay though.

I thought like that but I didn't have to think too deeply about it right now. I know I can't suddenly change the way I fight. I am not that skilled. If I fussed over such things, it'll only end in my failure.

As I was giving a vague nod to my friends, the door to the room made a noise and opened up. Everyone's gaze turned towards it.

"thanks for your hard work, Aya-sama."

"Ah, yeah. Thanks." (aya)

Aya-san replied to their greeting in a somewhat tired manner. I recalled just how much she disliked being called with a '-sama' suffix back when I travelled with her for a short while.

She really resembles Renji-sama in that sense. Souichi-sama gives an image of lightly putting it all aside but Renji-sama and Aya-sama always make a difficult expression whenever someone talks to them like this.

It was not very Hero-like that it felt pleasant and charming instead. I wonder if I'm being disrespectful to think like that though?

"What happened Aya-san, you seem a bit tired."

"No no, I just met my next opponent that's all."

"The next one?"

Who was it? I tried to recall.

That'd be the winner of the next match.....that means, either the adventurer team of the capital or the student team of the Tactics city.

That means, our next opponent must be the tactics city student team.

“Masaki-sama, is it?”(fran)

When I asked, not just Aya-san, even the other two girls made a surprised face.

I think the math result was already pretty obvious just from Aya-san's expression though?

“yes, that's right. I met Masaki-san, a little.”

“A little?”

“.....yeah, something like that.”

What happened I wonder?

As I tilted my head in confusion towards Aya-san who wasn't being very clear, next Souichi-san came through the doors. His expression was equally troubled as Aya-san.

“thank you for your hard work, Souichi-sama.”

Saying that, the girl the same age as me smilingly went to talk to him. The younger one, left one step behind, quickly followed after her towards Souichi-san.

Being surrounded by the girls, normally Souichi-san would have his usual happy, yet troubled vague expression but right now, as if he hadn't even realized the girls were there, he had a truly troubled face.

Once again, I looked towards Aya-san.

"Masaki-san, has proposed Souichi to fight each other seriously."(aya)

"Seriously?"

"Well, they still won't use their respective weapons though."

Serious, *i.e.* at full strength. Even now I feel that they are over powered already. To go even further than that.....i couldn't even imagine how amazing they'd be. It's not like I have ever stepped on the battlefield of the war that had lasted till an year ago even once. Only the active veteran soldiers and knights would be aware of these two's full strength.

Students like us could only imagine just how amazing they could be.

The image of Renji-sama appeared in my head but even he hasn't shown his full strength. The only times he even held Ermenhilde-sama was that time when fighting against those Orcs and in the battle against the Ogre near Magic City. And in both of those cases, according to Souichi-san, that was far from Renji-sama's full strength.

As I sat there unable to imagine just how incredible Souichi-san and Masaki-sama's full strength would be, Aya san gave a laugh while looking at me.

"Well, I bet it's hard to imagine considering how Souichi acts like normally."(aya)

"Eh, um, yes."(fran)

"Unlike what his face would suggest, he's actually pretty amazing."

"My face is unrelated okay!?!"

On Aya-san's words, Souichi-san reacted in a loud voice. He's always very conscious of his face, almost to desperate extents.

But then, all the gazes in the room focused towards Souichi-san, and realizing that he quickly ducked his head in embarrassment. How cute.

I think I realize why all the girls obsess over him so much a bit.

"So, what will you do?"(aya)

"No, I refused her."(souichi)

"What are you talking about, Souichi-sama?"(student girl )

Probably because she wasn't actually listening to our conversation, the younger girl asked. But he simply gave a vague smile back.

Aya-san gave another laugh at that. She must really find Souichi-san's troubled look to be amusing. And he only gave pleading looks asking for help towards her. It seems he was bad at dealing with women and was currently unable to move being surrounded from both sides.

"Well, it's nothing. I am interested in Masaki-san as well but I will definitely get scolded by Yuuko-san and Renji-niichan later so....."(souichi)

"That's true."(aya)

Aya-san nodded in agreement.

I couldn't imagine Renji-sama be angry but for Yuuko-sama to get angry must be.....really scary I suppose. Having received a title like The [Witch of the Capital], she must be a frightening person.

I recalled back when Renji-sama had collapsed and we had carried him over to the capital, I met her at the guest lounge.

At that time, she was really scary. Extremely cold eyes, that seemed like they could see through me completely.

Recalling that, I felt my face cramp a bit.

"Also, people will misunderstand the way you said that you know?"(aya)

“Huh, misunderstand?”(souichi)

“.....Well, whatever. Be careful of things behind you (read as Yayoi) at night okay?”(aya)

“Uh, sure. For the time being, the problem is the next battle. I want to look cool in front of niichan and I want to win as well.”(souichi)

“Obviously.”

But he must be hesitating over what to do. Though he refused, he’s getting second thoughts right now.

The full power of the [Brave] Souichi-san. I do want to see it but I also wonder whether that is something I’d want to see just out of curiosity as well.

It’s power granted by the Goddess Astraera herself. Power to protect the world and the power that did save the world. I don’t believe that power should be seen just out of curiosity. In the first place—

“Would it be fine to freely use your full strength inside the Coliseum, Souichi-san?”(fran)

“Yeah, you have a point.”(souichi)

Saying that, he scratched his head feeling troubled.

I believe that their full strength would be too much for the arena to bear, After all it is a power that rivals that of Gods—the Demon God.

“You did properly refuse her right?”(aya)

“I think so.”

“.....meaning?”

“Don’t make such a scary face. Even if I refused, I’m sure Masaki-san will come at me with full strength anyway.”

“Yeah, I guess that’s true.”

I don’t really understand but does that mean that Masaki-sama will not be satisfied with Souichi-san refusing?

“Well with normal weapons, I doubt the weapon would be able to bear it very long.”(souichi)

“As expected, even she wouldn’t draw her demonic sword right in front of Yuuko-san and others.....Right?”(aya)

“If that happened, I’ll die.”

The conversation seemed to be turning more and more dangerous but it’s not



like anything I could say would solve this.

“Are you not at very good terms?”(fran)

“It’s the opposite actually. Masaki-san wants to have a serious battle with Souichi.”(aya)

“I don’t get it.”

“She’s what you’d call a battle loving junkie.....she likes such things, just think of that way.”

“Haa.”

I don’t really understand what battle junkie means but basically Masaki-sama wants to have a serious battle with Souichi-san so much that she can’t resist it?

Neither Renji-sama nor Feirona-san show much interest in fighting so I’d don’t really get it though.

“That aside, Souichi-sama, are you free right now?”(girl student 1)

“Hm?”

“If you have time before the next match, how about——”(girl 1)

“We go for some tea or something?”(girl 2)

Seriously, I thought. It's great that you're carefree but we're still in the middle of the tournament you know?

Aya-san just continued laughing while watching Souichi-san troubling over this.

.....Are they completely disconnected with the concept of nervousness? I felt jealous of such team mates of mine as I dropped my shoulders without letting anyone else realize.

It was the 3rd round now. If we win 3 more times, we'll win the tournament but now only veteran warriors against whom normal students like us cannot stand were left in the tournament. While looking at the tournament table hung over the entrance of the Coliseum, I gave a sigh. Nearby were people who were passing time till the next match started or those that were betting on who'd win in the next match.

We were able to advance this far only thanks to Souichi-san and Aya-san. Also, because our opponents must have been underestimating us since we were students. But that won't happen anymore. Because we're facing another school next. Only the stronger one will win.

"But still, a win is a win."

While caressing the handle of the short blade hung on my waist, I nodded to myself. The sun that had been at the highest point when the tournament began was already beginning to set now. And its only a matter of time before it fully

sets. And with that, the team battle tournament will also end. No matter what the result, today half of the complete tournament will be over. That made me feel a bit sad.

Tomorrow, the individual battles will start. It'd be great if I'm able to win tomorrow as well.

"In the first round, I was so nervous that I didn't even realize that I had won till some time later.

I can't even remember how I fought or what moves I used to finish the battle. Before I realized, my opponent was just lying in the arena defeated. In the second round as well, my opponent let their guard down and I was able to win. Because I was a student and a woman. He looked like a rough adventurer but because he came close to me carelessly, I was able to win easily. Even goblins are more alert than that.

Victory. At first, I was just satisfied with taking part in the tournament but after coming this far, I'll be able to attain all that glory with just three more victories. It's so close to my reach.

I wonder how much have I grown while travelling with Renji-sama? Have I become stronger?

If I could get a solid proof of that...

"You alright?"

While I was thinking, a hand was put on my shoulder.

Looking back, a good-looking, long golden haired elf, Feirona-san was standing there. Beside him was Mururu-chan and Solnea-san as well.

“Huh?”(fran)

“What happened, making such a surprised face. We came to encourage you but you don’t seem that nervous.”(elf)

“Ah, no, it’s not like that.”

Nervousness.....I’ve won twice already, it’s faded a bit. But, I was just surprised by being called out by Feirona-san and others. Or rather, at the fact that all of them were here.

“I thought you weren’t good with crowds?”(fran)

Thus, I thought he wouldn’t come to see the tournament. During the morning, he did say ‘good luck’ to me already as well.

“fumu.”(elf)

I wonder what he was thinking of my reaction as he rested his chin on his finger as if in some deep thought.

The reason why each and every action of his feel like it could be made into a beautiful painting must be because his every movement is done with such grace and polish. He’s more noble-like than nobles who go through training for such

stuff.

“We came to cheer you on. Because we’re comrades.”(mururu)

“I see. Thanks a lot, Mururu-chan.”(fran)

Comrade. Feeling a bit embarrassed I patted Mururu-chan’s head to divert my emotions.

As I stroked her animal ears, she squinted in pleasure. Her expression was so cute that I put more strength into it but she made an embarrassed face and escaped from my hands.

“Normally, we should have come before the tournament began but we weren’t sure about the way to here.”(elf)

“No, I’m just happy you came here for me.”(fran)

“Then that’s great. Stuff like this is Renji’s speciality after all.”

“You can’t help it. Renji-sama is very busy as well right now.”

Since we travelled together so much I forgot how bad he was with crowded places. I’m very happy that he actually came all this way just to cheer for me.

Same for Mururu-chan. Maybe because she’s a beastwoman and her senses are too sharp, when in such a crowd, she gets confused from the chaos. Solnea-

san was.....i am not sure. Even when I look at her, she just looks back with dazed gaze. Even now, while Feirona-san and Mururu-chan were talking, Solnea just stared at us from a step back.

The one who talks the most to her was Renji-sama but she barely talks back to even him. Honestly speaking, I cannot tell what she's thinking at all.

"That aside, you seem to be putting your all. I thought that you might get flustered against a human opponent but you did pretty well."(elf)

"Really?"(fran)

"Un. Give your best in the next fight as well."(mururu)

Being told that by your comrades makes me really happy.

Next we're facing students like us but.....it'd be great if we could win. If they are watching as well, I really don't want to lose.

"I'll give my best, Mururu-chan."(fran)

This time she came close herself and I gently combed through her pretty silver hair.

"Francesca."

And, like a ripple in a calm lake, a quiet voice came to me.

Somehow, even though it was such a noisy place, I could clearly hear Solnea-san's voice.

It seems it was the same for Feirona-san and Mururu-chan as well as both of them looked towards her as well. Well, it's just too surprising for her to just talk after all.

"Why, do you fight?"(sol)

"umm, what do you mean?"(fran)

"I thought you didn't like fighting much?"(sol)

Ahh, I see.

"That's true, I don't really enjoy fighting."(fran)

Or rather, I'm just not very good at it.

I think I'm severely lacking in talent for fighting. Neither did I have a gift in magic nor in sword fighting. But even so, I became an adventurer.

The reason I've made it this far is all thanks to my comrades, for always protecting and helping me.

But still——

“Then why, do you take part in a show like this?”(sol)

“I don’t think it’s right to call this a ‘show’ though..”(fran)

I ended up giving a wry smile at such a frank wording by her. There are a lot of people desperate to take part in this [show] you know?

“I, want to know how much stronger have I gotten, how much have I grown, that’s all.”(fran)

“Growth?”(sol)

“It’s a bit embarrassing to talk about it but I was always the one being a burden to everyone else.”

When I said that, she looked at me with a confused look.

Her, confused yet expressionless face was so like her that I found it a bit amusing.

I want to know how much I, who had only been holding others back, have gotten stronger. I want to know how much I, who possesses not talent at all, have been able to grow. Things I learnt on my journeys, things I learnt at school, I want to know how far I can go by myself. This tournament is the best opportunity to learn that.

“I don’t understand.”(sol)



“I see.”

That’s why, I don’t feel sad even when she said that.

Once again, I stroked the handle of my short sword. I feel like I get courage just by touching this sword that has been with me from the start of my journey.

“Well then, I’m off.”(fran)

“Un, good luck.”(mururu)

“yeah, go and have fun.”(elf)

“.....I think it might be difficult to have fun though.”(fran)

After all, this time my opponent will be greater in both ability and talent than me. And neither would they let their guard down against me.

“Have more confidence in yourself. You don’t have to follow Renji’s example in that area as well.”(elf)

“Am I resembling him that much?”(fran)

“Don’t sound so happy about it.”

He sounded pretty happy as well. Mururu-chan as well.

Solnea-san continued to look at us in a daze as usual.

Curious I looked back at her but it's not like she'd do something just from that. As usual, I don't get her.

.

.

Cheers rose and I concentrated my gaze.

The one who entered the area, with the square arena in between them, were 10 people. Not a single one of the 10 were older than 20 yrs old and were students, yet I feel like the cheers are the greatest right now compared to all of today.

It was only natural. On this side were Souichi-san and Aya-san. On that side was Masaki-sama. This might be the biggest match of today that the people were most excited about.

I'm sure the rest of us are nothing more than extras right now. Thinking that way actually made me feel a bit more relaxed but it still didn't make my nervousness go away.

No matter who the audience is more interested in, I still have to fight. I can't feel relaxed yet. I am the first fighter from our team.

“uwahh.”

Nearby, Aya-san made a surprised and somewhat fed up voice. Since I, who was on the farthest end, could hear her, I bet everyone else could as well. On looking, she was putting a hand on her forehead and giving a sigh.

Beside her, even Souichi-san, though he didn't make a sigh, his face was clearly stiffening up.

Following their gaze, I also looked at their leader, Masaki-sama. Even the other 4 were only in their school uniform, only Masaki-san was in her full armaments.

That said, it wasn't some heavy armour or something. With her long beautiful black hair tied behind her back, she was wearing not her uniform but thick adventurer-like clothes. Above it, she wore a breastplate along with gauntlets on her arms and greaves on her legs. It's probably light weight and is meant to restrict as less movement as possible.

At her waist was a sword of shape I had never seen before. It wasn't just hanging on her waist like mine, it was properly fixed in place on her belt.

She looked exactly as the way she did back when they came back to the capital one year ago with the rest of the heroes after defeating the Demon God. Basically, she was in the exact outfit she used when fighting during the Demon God's subjugation.

.....I can understand Aya-san and Souichi-san's reaction.

I recalled the conversation back inside the waiting room. Masaki-sama truly wants to fight against Souichi-san seriously.

Her expression was, with a daring smile she was looking directly at Souichi-san.

Seeing her like that, Souichi-san was muttering something in a low voice. Probably, he must be talking about how to deal with Masaki-sama who was actually serious about this.

Since it's Souichi-san who has to fight her, it's not like we could do anything though.

“uwahh.....”

“What the hell. Is she serious?”

Seeing her dressed like that, the other two girls were uneasy and anxious as well. At the same time, every other member from the other side seemed to be filled with confident gazes.

I wonder if the leader's appearance alone is able to bring out this much of a difference. Though I can't really call it morale, but the other team sure has more vigour than us. And even among the audience, the ones cheering for them seem to be higher.

It was evening already. Probably, from the next match they'll use magic to

light up the arena.

And as the lighting of the surroundings changed, regardless of the cheers from the audience, a [voice] enhanced by magic resounded in everyone's head. At the same time, the cheers also stopped.

The [voice] called my name and I stepped up into the arena. At the same time, cheers rose once more.

“Well then, I’m off.”(fran)

“Do your best, Senpai.”

“Go get that first win for us!”

In my head, my introduction was given by the [voice]. The school I go to, and how I ended up taking part in the tournament. And the fact that I travelled with Renji-sama.

It's a bit embarrassing but after 3 rounds you get a bit used to it. Without minding it much, I drew my short sword and held it in my right hand. I looked straight in front without letting my eyes off the enemy. Taking one deep breath, all idle thoughts inside my head disappeared.

My opponent was man with a tough looking face for a student. With short blonde hair, his eyes seemed to hold strength. According to the introduction, he is supposed to be the same age as me but his body structure seemed to be as grown as adult men. In his hands he held a broadsword that I probably wouldn't be able to hold even with both hands. He was currently shouldering it.

“.....”

“oh, not going to even greet?”(boy)

While I was getting nervous while looking at his giant sword, he called out to me. It seems he’s quite the friendly guy.

In between the arena, I crossed glances with him. I’ve seen his fighting style many times during the tournament. He’s the type that lively swings around that giant sword. He shows quite a few openings but it’d be impossible to even parry him with my short sword.

I tried coming up with many countermeasure during the rest time but I wonder how well they’d work.

“hm.....”

I wonder what he thought as I didn’t answer as he scratched his head with his free hand.

At the same time, both of our introductions were finally over.

Once more, I took a deep breath.

“Now then,”

I put more strength in my arm holding the short sword.

As he changed stances and held his sword with both hands, at the same time he started closing in towards me unhesitatingly. His sword has the bigger reach, and he's more skilled at using the sword as well. Even if I want to use magic, I doubt he'd let that happen. After all, this is the 3rd round. Against an opponent that's come this far, my shabby magic won't work that easily.

While strafing in a circle at the centre of the arena, I gauged the distance between us. I'll distract him with my sword and use magic to deal the final blow. Just the same as always. Or rather, that's all I can do.

“—fuh!!”

The next instant, without any indication he rushed towards me while still holding his sword in his stance. Maybe because it's size was its special characteristic, he used his sword like a spear and charged towards me.

Maybe due to his great physique as well, for a second I felt like my body would just freeze but I quickly dodged to the side, when he quickly changed direction swung his sword horizontally towards me.

I received the sword swing that came with the sound of wind cutting with my short sword.

“kii?!?”

“Waa!!”

From my sword, a shrill sound I had never heard before came. Faced with the attack from a sword clearly much greater in mass, my sword felt like it was screaming.

Having difficulty to bear the strength of the sword, I was moved a few steps back.

So heavy. It's much heavier than I thought.

".....uu."

"It's amazing you were able to parry it with that thin sword."

My hand holding the sword had gone numb. Trying not to show that on my face, I held the sword with both hands. I can't take that one with just one hand.

Maybe he realized it as the man, as if to quickly end this battle, rushed in to attack again. This time, he held the sword high up.

And he swung it down at me. I averted that attack by receiving it at the widest portion of my short sword. The sound of sword clashing against sword resounded, and the sound of the large sword smashing on the ground came clearly even above all the cheers and shouting of the crowd.. The surface of the arena broke and its fragments blew around.

I tried to plunge in towards his chest but the large sword jumped back even faster. It's edge aimed for my legs.



I became a bit surprised from the sudden attack but I was able to jump back at the last moment and avoid it. Even though it smashed against the ground, his large sword looked completely fine.

“Not a bad dodge.”

“why, thank you.”(fran)

He swung his sword again. With the swing that seemed like it could cut through even the wind, my hair swayed slightly from it.

After only a few moves, my breathing was already ragged. One vs one matches really make me nervous. Stamina depletes faster and my limbs felt more fatigued than normal.

Stepping back enough where neither of our sword could reach each other, I reset our positions . My opponent seemed to be breathing completely normally and even seemed to composed. But still he looked at me with caution. Though talkative, he must have a steady personality.

While calming my breath, I held my sword down near my hips. But he didn't seem to rush in again and had become more careful. Maybe his sword actually wasn't in good condition but he didn't show it on his face so I couldn't be sure.

I let out a deep breath.

At the same time, I focused my magical energy towards my front. What I

imagined (read as created) was a ball of wind as big as possible for me.

Sensing the flow of magical energy probably, he hesitated for a second deciding what to do but the next moment he rushed towards me.

It was difficult to dodge wind balls. But if you could sense the magical energy, you could tell instantly and you could even notice the distortions in the air if you concentrate.

“fu!!”

Before my magic could be completed, the man closed in at me while making sure to avoid the ball of wind. The wind ball remained right in front of me since I had yet to fire it.

Having become sure of his victory, I clearly saw the change in his expression. He tried swinging down his sword with the momentum he had but still, it was too slow. Before he could swing his sword down, I exploded the ball of wind.

Though it didn't damage anyone clearly like a fire or an ice ball would, the explosion of the compressed wind blew both him and me away with its pressure.



For a second, my consciousness flew away and I became unable to understand what was what. When I realized, I was lying on the ground.

“th, this was.....”(fran)

This was more effective than I thought it'd be. It feels like my head was hit with a bludgeon weapon many times as I was still dizzy.

Somehow, I raised my head and saw the male student also lying on the ground a bit far away. He seemed to have become completely unconscious and wasn't moving at all. I'm sure he isn't dead.....

But still, I didn't think exploding magic would be so powerful.

Though there are explosive magic, I doubt there's any magician that uses it so close to themselves and even gets themselves dragged into it.

Maybe I'm the first one.

Headache and nausea hit me.

But enduring it, I stood up.

I can't win with my sword alone, I can't hit with just magic. Then I thought I'll have no choice but to get myself dragged into it as well. Maybe I was a bit too hasty.

The [voice] inside my head declared me as winner but even that only made me feel bad.

As I stepped down of the arena, everyone came to me worried. I guess this was supposed to happen. I did explode magic so close to me.

Even Souichi-san and Aya-san were giving a bitter smile.

“The next one, I leave the rest to you.”(fran)

“Yes!”

The younger girl gave an energetic reply.

This makes one win. Now if only both Aya-san and Souichi-san win.....I wonder if we'll be able to advance once again?

## Interlude 6

(Souichi POV)

As Aya climbed up the arena, loud cheering, incomparable to the ones Francesca-senpai got, rose in the audience.

We were currently at 1 win and 2 losses.

If Aya lost here, the match will be decided. And for a hero to fight at such a time, it's only normal for the audience to get so excited.

Looking up towards guest seats, I saw Yui-chan watching the match from the balcony.

I couldn't hear her from here but by the looks of it she seemed to be cheering Aya on.

"Will Aya-san be able to win?"

"I doubt she'd have any problem to be honest." (souichi)

The one who asked me that was the only one in our team except me and Aya who had won all her fights, Francesca-senpai.

It seems her travelling with Renji-niichan wasn't just for show as she definitely seemed to be levels above normal students. Even in the first and second round, though she must have been underestimated, she still did win against pro adventurers so her ability was the real deal.

Well, even if Aya and I won, if noone else had won their fights, we would be able to advance so honestly, I'm relieved that she had such skill.

And currently, it seems like the damage she took from her previous battle was still left as she walked slightly unsteadily. No matter how I looked at her, it seemed dangerous.

"That aside, are you sure you should be walking already? I think you should sit down for a bit more."(souichi)

"uu.....is it that easy to tell?"(fran)

"Well, yeah."

After all, her steps are not firm at all.

Even if Francesca-senpai's magical energy wasn't that high, exploding the air so close was still overdoing it. In the worst case, she could have blown her own eardrums as well.

In fact, it should be said that she was lucky to have just taken some damage and fainted for a while after that. Nobody at the magic academy teaches such a way of fighting. Where the hell did she learn that?

“Aya’ll be fine. She’ll definitely win.”(souichi)

“Eh?”

I held not a sliver of doubt when I said that.

Certainly, Aya is one of the summoned like us and even strong enough to be called as the Grand Magus, having reached the peak of magic.

But above all, I know that a word like [definitely] doesn’t exist.

No matter how advantageous of a situation there is, even a small mistake could overturn it all. Despair was always there, right by our side.

But, even then.

We are supposed to be [Heroes].

A human known as a [Hero] is simply not allowed to lose. That, is a definite fact.

{Heroes} who are meant to be the hope of the people must win no matter what.

There is no such thing as ‘definite’ in this world, yet, we must definitely win.



.....that's the kind of existences we are.

Though there are times when we were told that we simply think too much about it but I believe that that is what being a [Hero] is all about.

Well, the definition of a Hero varies from person to person though.

“Rather than that, watch her carefully.”(souichi)

Saying that, I turned back to look at the arena.

In Aya's hands was just a staff made of oak wood that could easily be mistaken for a normal stick.

Her opponent had, though blunted, a splendid long sword. Judging by the way he seemed adept with an unfamiliar sword provided by the tournament administration, the guy must be a very adept fighter.

Even his expression seemed to hold confidence. Even if his opponent was Aya, she was a magician. He must be thinking that if he could push this fight into a close quarters, he'll be able to defeat her with a flurry of sword swings.

His expression is clearly showing that.

“I think, this'll be a good learning experience for you as well.”(souichi)

Inside my head, the magic [voice] resounded. The opponent and Aya's

introductions began.

It seems the opponent fighter was pretty well known in his school. He was a year older than us, and also seemed to have experience as an adventurer like Francesca-senpai.

It seems he's not a noble born which is why he seems to have some pride in his sword skills.

Against him was Aya, a top student of the Magic Academy and the Grand Magus. One of the [Heroes] that subjugated the Demon God and also the world's greatest magician.

Both of them faced each other on the arena. One held a blunt long sword while the other held a wooden staff that looked like a stick.

I think Francesca-senpai was also worried due to the difference in their weapons as well. Since she was unable to deal with the large sword used by her opponent with her short sword, she must be worried for Aya who just had a staff.

"It's starting."

When I said that, the magic [voice] declared match start and at the same time, the swordsman, like common sense would dictate, instantly moved to reduce the distance between them. To stop Aya from activating magic.

Magic was manifested from the imagination of the caster. Then first, so that the magician becomes unable to freely imagine, to obstruct their thought

process, it is considered basic to put as much pressure by closing in on the magician as possible.

Certainly, against a normal magician that is a very viable tactic.

In this world, the job of magicians was the same as artillery. To use long ranged attacks with wide area of effect to destroy the groups of enemies. That's the first and foremost expectation of a magician on the battlefield.

After that, by working together with a knight or other similar warriors, they use magic to destroy single enemies one by one while the knight holds the enemy back.

In either case, the image of [magicians are to be protected by close range fighters] was strong.

In that sense, the definition of magician was not applicable to Aya. She'd be a new type of magician. That's exactly why she's called the [Grand Magus].

Well, it was Koutarou-san who gave her that name at first and he was also the one who made it popular with the public though.

I'm pretty sure the main reason for him was probably – 'since we're in a different world, it'd be cooler to have aliases and nicknames!' or something like that. As a matter of fact he is the only one in this whole world who possess the title of [The Wizard] as well. In easier words, he just wants 'something' that sets us apart from normal people.....at least that's what others said.

In Aya's case, out of embarrassment or something of being given such a

nickname she really dislikes Koutarou-san.

.....Even I think it's pretty cool though.

But if I say that, she'll really angry so I won't.

While I was wondering about such things, the match had already begun.

Even though he wasn't much older than us, his sword looked sharp as he attacked Aya. His sword swing's speed and power probably surpasses the one who fought against Francesca-senpai.

But Aya didn't run away from it, instead she faced it head on.

Receiving the sword swung towards her with her staff with full confidence, she parried it away turning the attack powerless. I wonder how magicians are there in this world that can deflect a sword with a wooden staff?

Her fighting style was actually quite similar to what Francesca-senpai uses. Or rather should I say, Francesca-senpai's fighting style resembles Aya's.

Chasing after the same person and looking at the same person's fighting style, I guess it was normal for both of them to end up with the same fighting style. While thinking that, I observed Aya's fight closely.

Maybe it was obvious but Aya's movements were incomparably polished than Francesca-senpai's. With just the minimum required movement, while negating the opponents attacks, she kept herself with lots of room to act. Just like a

swordsman is supposed to put pressure on a magician by closing in, instead she was putting pressure on him by constantly parrying his attacks.

And all this was being done by her without the help of any boost to physical abilities through magic. And also because she'd get scolded by the tournament and arena managers, she wasn't even allowed to use her trap and pitfall magic. Those ones would completely destroy the arena after all and it'll take too much time to repair it all again apparently.

Meanwhile, the opponent's swings started becoming rougher and sloppier. He must be really confident of his close combat skill as he didn't seem to want to admit that he was being defeated by a magician in it and didn't fall back. And that gap in his mind would result in mistakes in his fighting style.

No matter what the situation, no matter who the opponent was, you must maintain your cool. It's very difficult, I know, but it's still very important.

As he swung another side slash, it lacked its speed and power and Aya was in no way going to let go of that opening as she struck his hand with her staff ending his attack. It must have been a perfectly done counter hit as that one attack made him drop his sword.

Holding his hand that as struck, he kneeled down without even trying to pick his sword again. It seemed like his hand hurt a bit too much, maybe even his bones had been hurt.

And that was the end. In my head, the [voice] declaring Aya as winner resounded. Even though this was supposed to be the 3rd round's vice-leader match, it ended so quickly.

“See, she won.”(souichi)

“.....haa. As expected, she, Aya-san, really is strong”(fran)

The audience made excited noises as the match had ended in the same time as we spent talking.

Most of the crowd was shouting Aya’s name. Probably because Aya’s pretty cute, she was pretty popular with men as well. As her childhood friend, it’s pretty complicated to be honest.

In the meantime, Aya came down from the arena. As if it was normal, she was neither sweating nor even out of breath.

“Good job.”(souichi)

“Good job, Aya-san.”(fran)

As me and Francesca-senpai spoke to her, she silently but while giving us a smile, stood alongside us. The remaining teammates got the same reaction.

Aya wasn’t really cold to others. She was shy/anxious around strangers but she was already pretty open to all our teammates.

But, somehow.....her dignified, or should I say, her personality of creating walls around herself felt really confusing. It was the same for everyone else.

Thinking till that, I looked up once more. This time, not just Yui-chan but even Renji-niichan was watching from the balcony. Probably he came to see Aya's match. And also Aya's reaction. Even though normally she'd give a high five at such situations, right now she was acting as if it was normal for her to win.

I'm sure he must be making a teasing face right now while seeing Aya... thinking that, I realized I was smiling as well.

"Looks like you were able to show your coolness in front of Renji-niichan, eh?"(souichi)

"———"

"Ack!?!"

My foot was crushed in silence.

I wasn't in full armament like Masaki-chan so I was only wearing some thin leather boots. That's why.....it really hurt. While becoming silent myself, I grit my teeth to avoid screaming in pain.

As expected, it'd be too uncool to squat down from the pain so I endured it.

But, Francesca-senpai who noticed it seemed surprised, or rather was making a pained face in my place.

"Shut up."(aya)

“.....yes.”

In my opinion, rather than acting all mature like that I think Renji-niichan would enjoy her happily celebrating her victory more though.

Well, I'll get my foot crushed again so I'll just keep my mouth shut.

I'm worried that he'd actually think that Aya had a dry personality who'd act like it was obvious for her to win instead since she looks pretty mature as well. That said, if it's Renji-niichan, he probably understands Aya's personality pretty well already so it should be fine.

In truth, she's actually pretty emotional and also has a very childish side as well. Even then, she'd always try to act tough and would always act like she's angry when she's actually embarrassed.

Well, I'm pretty sure there are guys out there who find that nice but for those who know her true personality.....well, it's not like I know everything about her either though. But still, I feel like it'd be fine if she'd act a bit more sweet and childish than now. At least when Renji-niichan is watching.

I'm pretty sure she'd seem much cuter then.

“Souichi-san, calling a girl ‘cool’ isn’t really a compliment.”(fran)

“Wha”(souichi)

“Guh.....that’s not it!”(aya)



What the hell— —how should I say this, but hearing Francesca-senpai's stupid words, I could also only answer looking stupid.

After that, I got scolded by Aya in a low voice. Why me?? Well, it's the usual so I don't really care anymore.

But, maybe she got a bit embarrassed, her cheeks were a bit red so she didn't feel scary at all.

Instead, I ended up smiling when she looked at me like that.

There's nothing more amusing than seeing your childhood friend's state in love.

But, I still get my foot crushed though.

..... There's nothing more physically painful than seeing your childhood friend's state in love as well it seems.

"Just go and quickly win the next round as well."(aya)

"Yeah, sure."

"You need to show your cool form to Renji-sama as well right?"(fran)

"Please, enough of that!"

Francesca-senpai teased us a bit at that.

Why is it that I get my foot crushed but Francesca-senpai only get an embarrassed reaction from her? I can't get over this bias. Is it because I'm a guy?

In front of this unreasonable absurdity, and while tilting my head in confusion while looking at my childhood friend hiding her embarrassment, I climbed into the arena as told by the [voice].

On the other side, Masaki-san climbed up while giving a wide smile.

"As usual, you guys are so lively. It makes me a bit jealous Souichi-kun."(masaki)

"Want to switch places with me?"

"I'll have to decline you on that offer."

Saying that, Masaki-san hid her mouth with her hand as she laughed. How elegant looking, or should I say graceful way of laughing she has.

Yet, she's dressed in such dangerous looking equipment. After all, that's the same outfit she had when fighting during the Demon God's subjugation. That's not what one would wear for just a fighting tournament.

Maybe my thoughts showed on my face as the playful atmosphere

disappeared from around Masaki-san.



“I told you that I’ll fight seriously, didn’t I?”

“And I am sure I refused you as well.”

“Yes. That’s why, I alone will get serious.”

Saying that, she extended her hand towards the [katana] fixed to her waist.

Katana. A Japanese sword. It shouldn’t exist in this world, it’s a sword from our world.

But, I didn’t feel the magical energy that comes with it usually. And the colour of that sheath was.....it didn’t have a colour that would indicate that it was one of her demonic swords. It was not Ruby(red), Sapphire(blue), emerald(green), Topaz(yellow) or Silver.

The shape of the black sheath showed that it was definitely a katana but I don’t recall seeing that one before.

“This one, I had Rin-san forge this for me just for this tournament.”(Masaki)

Realizing my gaze, she told me so.

Ah, I see. I could also understand that.

Rin-san who was an [Item Creator] could definitely create a katana as well. Back when we were travelling together as well, when we had not yet gotten holy swords and demonic swords, Rin-san was the one who made weapons for us.

“.....isn’t that unfair?”(souichi)

“If you think it is, you can draw your holy sword, you know?”

“I think I’ll pass on that.”

The way of using western swords and japanese katana was completely different. In fact you could say that it’s equal for her to use a katana and me to use a western sword.

But, I was using a dull sword provided by the coliseum and she was using a katana forged by a hero. It might not be equal after all. Of course, meaning that I was at a disadvantage.

While we were talking like this, the magic [voice] resounded in my head and the introduction for me and Masaki-san began. Even after so many times it really still feels weird to hear someone talk about you in front of so many people. A bit embarrassing.

“fufu.”

Maybe she realized my inner thoughts as she gave a small laugh.

And she began to move out a bit just where we were out of each other’s swords’ reach. I as well, to match her placed myself on the arena.

The introductions finally ended.

I drew my sword from the sheath and threw the sheath away.

Masaki-san remained just like the way she was, with her katana still inside the sheath.

“Fuu.”

I took a breath.

I am a bit nervous. I felt I was gripping my sword slightly stronger than I should.

How many times has it been when I’ve held the sword like this facing against Masaki-san?

I felt a bit nostalgic.

Both me and Masaki-san were swordsmen/women.

We were not warriors like Renji-niichan, Itou-san or Enomiya-san.

And neither were we knights like Kuuki-san.

We have clashed our swords and fought each other countless times to test our skills.

Sword and Katana. Even with the difference in those two.

“Let’s do this!!”

“Come!!”

——at least in a sword fight, I don’t want to lose to anyone.

That alone, we won’t let each other have.

We were both on the opposite ends of the arena. Normal people might take a few seconds to get to each other but for us, we covered that distance in an instant. Kicking the floor with my leg, we moved while destroying the floor with our momentum.

“Waah!!”

“Zeeyaah!!”

I swung down my sword and Masaki-san cut at it with her katana.

She used Battoujutsu. (T/N:The art of drawing the katana from the sheath and striking very fast.)

Using the momentum of drawing the katana from its sheath, the swing possessed far more speed than a normal slash of the katana.

And Masaki-san also had the divine protection of the goddess on her that gave her superhuman physical ability and above that, her katana was something created by Rin-san, a Hero as well.

Unable to withstand such a slash, my sword was cut in half.

“tchh!”

With the momentum of having cut through my sword, the katana swung towards my neck.

Following the katana coming towards me with my eyes in that instant, I killed my momentum and jumped backwards. My chest was slashed slightly and a prickling pain came to me. If Masaki-san had taken one more step further, it would have been a fatal attack. Or rather, if I hadn't dodged I would've definitely died.

Did she swing confident that I'd dodge or was she unable to simply stop herself in time?.....It's probably the latter. But yet, for some reason, I felt happy inside.

If it's me, I can react to it. If it's me I can dodge it. If it's me, I will not die. That was acknowledgement and trust from the battle junkie Masaki-san and also a proof that she was serious. And being faced with that I only felt happy..... maybe deep inside I'm also a battle junkie.

Even though this test of strength was closer to an actual battle to the death; I'm sure Yayoi would call me imprudent and scold me.



In my hands was a sword cut from the middle. And Masaki-san once again, sheathed her katana.

She's not sure of her victory or anything. Even now, her waist was still lowered, fully prepared to react against anything I might do next.

While seeing her reaction, I also lowered my waist and took stance with my still broken sword.

The magic [voice] had yet not declared who was the winner. Normally, the fact that my sword got cut to two would decide the winner but I have not given up yet!

“Fuu.....”

I took a long, deep breath.

I focused all of my nerves. I turned all my vision towards Masaki-san. Even the cheers that could make the air tremble and the shouts of encouragement were now out not audible to me.

Just, only——next, I will cut Masaki-san.

I thought of just that.

Only a moment had passed.

Or maybe it was a few seconds.

Maybe even more than that.

Once more, both us moved at the same time.

Almost foolhardily from the front, as if to recreate the previous time where my sword got cut, I rushed to attack.

The only difference was that I only had half of my sword now.

But even so, Masaki-san showed neither negligence nor overconfidence. Maintaining her katana drawing stance, she jumped in towards me.

What she released was a slash that could tear through even steel.

As my reply to that, I took one step even further towards her. Since half of my blade was gone, my sword won't reach even where hers could.

Then, all I had to do was take another step, and use the lower remaining portion of my sword to block it. No matter how sharp the katana was, only a portion of the wielder's physical strength is carried inside the slash.

If I could block her where the strength in her sword was the lowest, even this dull sword of mine will be able to block it.

We were close enough that our faces could hit each other. I moved faster. I

used my other hand to grab her by her collar.

In such cases, a katana which is long becomes disadvantageous. She will become unable to both swing or thrust the katana. Even if I don't have a big body, I am still a guy who has received the [Divine Protection of the Goddess] as well. I won't lose in terms of brute strength. While still holding her collar, I slammed her down on the stone floor. Since we're still in the middle of the match, I was unable to control my power properly when smashing her down on the floor.

And then, I pushed the broken sword to her neck.

"That..... hurt!"(masaki)

"Do you, surrender?"

Masaki-san groaned in pain and my breathing had become rough as well.

If she didn't have her breastplate, I would've looked completely like a pervert pushing a girl down while groping her breasts.



“ ..... ”

“.....”

Just like that, a few moments pass.

As I waited for Masaki-san’s pain to fade away...

“Pervert.”

While slightly blushing, she said that.

At the same time, the magic [voice]— —informed that I had lost due to foul play and Masaki-san had won.

“Eh!?!?”

Surprised, I jumped up from Masaki-san.

No matter how you look at it, this was my win right?!

Thinking that I looked towards Aya only to see her give a wide smile. That, is the smile she gives when she’s really angry. This isn’t the smile she shows towards Renji-niichan. While feeling confused as to what happened, I saw silver hair that shouldn’t come in my view normally.

There, in a panic I brought my own bangs/forelocks in front of me to see them.

My hair that are supposed to be black had turned silver.

Finally, I understood what happened. Before taking part in the tournament, I recalled what Yuuko-san had told me.

“”You are not allowed to use either holy sword or demonic swords, and are also supposed to hold back your abilities when fighting.””

She had told me so.

“fufu. That last one.....Souichi-kun’s serious strength, was really great.”(masaki)

Hearing her, I finally realized.

I, at the final moment——when I felt happy seeing Masaki-san’s serious mode, I ended up suing my full strength.

I was using not just the magical energy given to me by Astraera-sama, but even the supply from the Spirit God Zwenelia-sama; the fact that I was in my form when I prepare to draw the [Holy Sword] was proof of that.

As I dropped my shoulders, the audience gave a huge cheer again.

They must have gotten all excited seeing this form of mine. Apparently, when in this form, I resemble the Goddess quite a lot or so they say. Even though I’m a guy.

Also, could you please not make such a pleased expression with a red face while saying things like 'my serious strength'. You'll definitely make me imagine weird things. Or rather, I'll end up imagining them. I'm also a guy in puberty you know?

But that rude delusions also lasted for a moment. 2 to 3, the [voice] declared that our team had lost.

As for me, I'm more scared about the scolding I'm surely about to get from my dear old childhood friend though.

## Chapter 50: Footsteps of Disasters and Troublesome Things

As I took off the heavy and difficult to move in armour, I ended up leaking a sigh in relief.

Toudou beside me seemed to be the same as he also breathed a truly tired sounding sigh. The brown haired Head Maid—Angela-san looked at him with a smile as she helped Toudou in removing his armour.

Wearing a black one piece dress with a white apron above, and her semi-long hair tied behind her head and the iconic headband on her head, she had the perfect look of a maid. Even her tight atmosphere had not changed making others focus on their tasks as well.....but today, or rather, right now, this Head maid, who is famous for being always strict and harsh, seemed to have a gentle expression as she interacted with Toudou. At least, compared to the time when I was in the castle back an year ago, her atmosphere seems completely different. She looks like someone dealing with her troublesome younger brother, or child maybe; close yet maintained some distance between them.

I am definitely not imagining this. Even like the way I am, I am pretty confident of my ability to gauge women.

“Say, Toudou.”(renji)

“Hm, What is it?”



“Do you show up at the castle quite a lot or something?”

When I asked that, he looked at me with puzzled face having not understood why I was asking that.

“No, not really, Why?”(toudou)

“No, you seemed pretty close to Angela-san so I thought so.....”

“haa.....”

“It’s probably your imagination?”(Angela)

[Why, what’s the matter?]

It seems he really didn’t understand what I was implying as toudou tilted his head in confusion. And Angela-san as well, answered without showing any expression on her face.

What is this? How should I say it, I feel like there’s a wall in between. It might just be my imagination but I’m pretty sensitive to such changes you know?..... I’m sure there’s a difference between how she acts with me and him.

“fuun..”

“.....What’s up with that, you’re making me curious now.”(toudou)

“Don’t mind it.”

[You’re making a weird face, Renji.]

Drop it, will you partner? I was born with this weird face okay? While feeling a bit sad inside, I replied that.

Unlike Ermenhilde and Toudou, Angela-san did realize something.....but she continued to briskly help Toudou remove his armour. She truly is the model maid, I can’t find a way to tease her. Well I’d probably get scolded if I go too far as well so I can’t tell how much far I can go with it. After neatly placing the removed armour on the table, I was thinking of how to tease Toudou when Angela-san gave a glance towards me. There, underneath the cold eyes that resembled Utano-san’s, I felt I also saw a slight bit of shyness.

“What?”(renji)

“As usual, your habits of teasing have not gone it seems.”(angela)

“Even like this, I feel like I’m am actually being quite considerate you know?”

“.....haah.”

Was her sigh meant for me or towards Toudou? Or maybe it was meant for herself.

Toudou’s denseness is definitely a problem but Angela-san not letting her shyness show at all is a problem as well. She must not feel very good to show

such a side of her personality.

Maids are beings that kill their personal desires to work solely for their masters apparently. She must feel that it would be a mistake to let such a side of her personality to be shown. She seemed quite similar to the early Utano-san making me feel a bit nostalgic. Well, she's still not the type who expresses much emotion easily though.

While giving a sidelong glance at those two who seemed to be 'flirting' while removing his armour, I gently stroked the armour set I kept on the table. A full mithril armour set. I wonder how many silver coins were spent to buy all this. (T/N: reminder, silver >gold in this world)

[What are you doing?]

"no, just, you know."

[That doesn't really tell me anything.]

Normally I don't treat Ermenhilde as precious as I am treating this armour set, it's more like flicking her with my fingers or hitting her while in pocket etc after all. Her voice seemed to be a bit irritated. Her reaction was so amusing that I teased her only to get a more sulky reply from her. I, who was really enjoying her irritated voice, might not have a very good personality after all.

"To me, yamada-san and Eru-san seem to be on better terms though?"(toudou)

[.....Really?]

“Well, yeah.”(renji)

He seemed to be grinning thinking that he was teasing me as payback but it's a true fact though. Something like that isn't going to trouble me.

Ermenhilde answered that in an irritated voice but her tone turned for the better at the end hearing that. She's so easy to understand. So when I agreed without any hesitation, all of her bad mood disappeared instantly.

“Really, you two get along so well.”

“But who did she take it after, she's started scolding me recently.”(renji)

[That's because you're always being so undisciplined.]

As Toudou spoke that, Ermenhilde replied in a loud voice as if I had said something false. But still, her voice still seemed more happier than normal. I guess her mood really must have gotten better.

Probably because I didn't pay her much attention recently. Or maybe because I had been holding that mithril sword instead of her for the past few days.

“So, how's it been for you recently, Angela-san?”

“recently?”

“I’m talking about you, Toudou.”(renji)

When I said that while laughing, Toudou simply tilted his head in confusion and behind him, Angela-san narrowed her eyes without letting Toudou realize.

Even her cold strong eyes now only seemed like a way to hide her embarrassment.

“I’ll leave it to your imagination, Renji-sama.”(angela)

Even while listening to our conversation, she continued to remove Toudou’s armour skilfully. As expected of the Head Maid, I guess. Maybe she had realized my intention, she did not let any emotion flow into her words, let alone her expression.

As expected, I could definitely feel this wall of difference between me and Toudou.

I’m not really feeling sad about it, in fact that’s what makes this so amusing.

[You’re making a mean teasing face again, Renji.]

“What do you mean by, ‘again’?”

I don’t recall making such a face before.

And Toudou as usual made a confused face not really understanding what

was going on.....This guy is so dense!

Does he not even realize that even I got no help from a single maid since the preparations for the tournament were so hectic?

“That aside, what are you going to do about the bet?”(toudou)

“Bet?”(renji)

“Didn’t we bet that the winner will be treated to a meal?”

[Oh yeah.]

“What are you ‘oh yeah’-ing for? You were the first one to lose, Ermenhilde.”(renji)

[.....]

So she goes silent when it’s against her eh?

Well, it’s not like Ermenhilde could cook anyway. Or rather, I doubt anyone would have guessed that among the teams we chose, Souichi’s team would be the first one to lose.

If I had to say, we all thought the adventurer team from the Commerce City that Toudou bet on would be out the first. After all, even if they had good equipment, they were still amateurs.....well, maybe that would be saying too

much but it's true that they were low on experience. Though the reason maybe because there aren't much monsters near there. That might be the effect of a demon god's descendant as well but let's leave that aside for now.

More important was Souichi and Masaki-chan's duel. I didn't expect Souichi to lose due to violation of rules. Well, that was fun to watch on its own and it really excited the audience as well so it's fine though.

Souichi's transformation. He possesses not just goddess Astraera's but also the Spirit God Zwenelia's divine protection as well. That was the special characteristic of the Brave only and also the proof that he was the wielder of the Holy Sword as well. Among all of us 13, only he is the one who has received the divine protection of 2 gods.

When used, his hair turn silver and eyes turn golden. It's not as much as Koutarou but his appearance changes quite a bit. On top of being child faced as well, Souichi ends up looking even more girl-like. If he was a bit more taller, he really would look like Astraera like the people say.

"Well in the end, the one who won the bet was Kuuki though."(renji)

"yeah. I'll prepare the place and ingredients so at least help me with the cooking okay?"(toudou)

"Sure. Well, even I'd feel bad if I didn't help even that much."

[What should I do?]

"Cheer and encourage us as we work or something."

[Alright.]

“No, wait, that’d be way too uncharacteristic of her to do something like that or rather, how should I say this.....”(toudou)

Seeing our talk, Toudou spoke in a troubled tone. He must be really worried about how to react.

Certainly, even if Ermenhilde cheered for us like [Do your best!~] even I wouldn’t know what kind of face to make afterwards.

AS we continued such chatter, Angela-san finished taking off the armour off Toudou. Why did it take more time than me to take his armour off when I was doing it alone? I doubt I’ll get the answer even if I ask though.

“Well, the treat will be after the tournament is fully over though.”(renji)

“Somehow, that sounds like you just raised a flag to be honest.”(toudou)

“oi, you idiot, shut up. Don’t jinx it.”

Seriously why would he say something like that.

“I don’t intend to raise any flags right now.

Saying that, I loosened the collar of the shirt I was wearing underneath the



armour.

His collar must have been tight as well as he moved around his neck and shoulders with a smile.

“now then, I’ll take your armours for safekeeping.”(angela)

Saying that, she clapped her hands when a few maids, they were probably waiting behind the door, came in.

Wait if so many were available, couldn’t one of these have helped me with taking off the armour as well? I don’t really find it to be unreasonable but somehow, I felt a bit unconvinced, making me feel a bit strange.

Giving a word of thanks to the maids, I started to leave the room.

But, while I was leaving, one of them said “Please learn to read the mood more.” in reply.

[So Renji is bad at reading the mood eh?]

“Not as much as you.”

Giving a curt reply, I gave a sigh.

But c’mon, I couldn’t help but tease them. A straight-laced maid and a dense cook. I’m sure even the maids, who seem to be carefully watching over their

progress, should have enjoyed this as well.

Maybe because I wasn't in the armour anymore, my body felt cold as I walked through the stone corridor along with Toudou. We didn't pass by anyone else probably because everyone's out watching the tournament. Only maids and guards in steel armour were left. All would bow as they'd pass us but their minds didn't seem to be here though. I'm sure they wanted to go watch the tournament as well.

"What's wrong?"(toudou)

"Nah, just thinking how nice and peaceful it is right now."

"Yeah. It's nice."

Both me and Toudou muttered the same thing.

It might feel like we were old men when saying that though. While thinking that, I turned left at the crossroads.

"Oh right."

There, I recalled something and raised my voice and looked towards Toudou. While looking at me who stopped suddenly, Toudou stopped as well.

"I forgot to say something to Angela-san."(renji)

[What happened?]

“no, I need to talk to Utano-san later so I wanted to tell her to send some alcohol to her room later but I forgot.”(renji)

“.....is that so?”(toudou)

What’s with that fed up gaze? While faced with Toudou’s disgusted gaze, I put a hand on his shoulder.

“Go ask her for me.”(renji)

“Why me!?!”

“Well, if I went, she’d definitely start scolding me.”

“If you know that then just endure it.....”

[In the first place, all will be better if Renji stopped drinking so much.]

“Don’t say that.”(renji)

Bring Ermenhilde out of my pocket, I stroked the rim of the medal gently.

Or rather, I’m acting as the cupid between you and Angela-san okay? It’s not like I was hurt when the maids told me to read the mood or anything, alright?

“Please, Toudou?”

“But, wouldn’t Angela-san be mad?”

“Don’t worry. In fact, she’d be happy.”

[In fact, she’d be fed up of you to be honest.]

Well, can’t deny that. Even Ermenhilde was speaking in tired voice right now. While saying that as I walked away leaving Toudou behind, I heard a sigh from behind. And then I heard his footsteps go the other way.

[Even I feel bad for Hiiragi right now.....]

“Yeah, I’ll make it up to him later in some way.”

[haah.....]

Well if this results in some progress in those two, he’ll be the one to thank me instead.

.....I’ll probably have to make it up to him, I guess.

It’s been an year since I left on my journey. They might have made some progress from when they met in the meantime but they definitely cannot be called a couple. Then something like this will probably not result in any progress

at all.....well, it'll be a satisfactory result if they could at least enjoy sometime with each other while in the festive mood.

Maybe I alone have not realized and they're actually closer than I thought? Then that'd be great as well. It's always nice to see your own comrade's receive happiness after all.

"Now then, what to do next?"

[How about going to Souichi and others?]

"They're probably with their school friends."

I'm not going to interrupt them there. I'm sure they want to spend time with their friends with whom they fought together. I was thinking of making fun of Souichi for going all out in front of the audience but I'll leave it for later. Utano-san and Kuuki seem busy with work as well and I have no idea where Kudou or Yui-chan are.

Deciding to go back to my room in the end, I went back the way I came. I did say something about going to Utano-san's room later but actually I have no such plans and that was just an excuse so I was totally free right now.

I could go to meet Feirona and the others but it's already getting dark outside. It'd be unrealistic to go looking for someone in the capital so late.

"I guess, I should get changed first."

Even though I had taken off the armour, I'm still wearing high quality expensive fabric clothes that nobles would wear. It could get torn just by moving a bit roughly or so it made me feel when I wore it making me feel nervous.

Being too used to adventuring, I prefer practicality focused clothes above these. Now whether that's a good thing or bad is questionable.

While thinking of that, I reached room and felt a presence already inside my room.

I thought it might be Kudou or Yui-chan but I still got a bit cautious seeing someone already inside my room. Holding the doorknob with my left hand, I held Ermenhilde in my right.

"Ermenhilde."

[Yeah, I know.]

A jade coloured magical energy leaked and a single edged short knife appeared in my hands.

As I opened the door cautiously---

"Yaa."

"....."

The intruder in my room raised a hand and greeted me with a smile. Sitting on the chair near the centre table, the table already had two cups of tea with steam coming out of it already prepared.

With curly silver hair, one red eye and one gold, and with looks that could make one mistake him for a beauty, he smiled and looked directly at me.

Even though the sun had set, he hadn't bothered lighting the lamp either. Only the red moon's faint light shined inside the room. But still the fact that it felt bright inside must be because of some magic was used.

Looking at him, I felt stupid to have become cautious and I leaked a sigh. At the same time, the knife disappeared by turning into jade green coloured magical energy.

"Why are you getting all relaxed inside someone else's room, Koutarou?"

"I can't help it Renji-dono. It's troublesome if people see me after all."

You're just bad at being secretive and also get caught by Utano-san that's all. Nobody would bother you if you just got to the gist of it and honestly told everyone what that future seeing eye saw.

While thinking that, I closed the door behind me.

"Well great timing. I was getting bored anyway."(renji)

"Splendid. It's a delightful thing if we have nothing to do."(kou)

“Seriously.”

“But still, you seem to be getting involved into some trouble again, eh?”

“If you know about it then help me damnit.”

Sitting opposite of him, I spoke while giving a wry smile.

I recalled the events at the [Forest of Rotting Souls] and became unable to say anything else. I can't understand why he contacted Yui-chan to help me when he foresaw my death instead of taking action himself directly. I know that he saved me but still I can't understand what this chunnibyou wannabe wizard is thinking.

I wonder what he was thinking as he said nothing and took a sip from his tea.

[You seem energetic as usual.]

“You as well, Ermenhilde.”(kou)

“———”

The way he spoke made me feel as if my heart had been grabbed.

“Yeah, both me and Ermenhilde are fine.”(renji)



“That’s great. I was really worried about both of you, you know?”

While feeling a bit lost for words, I spoke that.

Back when we were on the journey to subjugate the Demon God, all of my comrades called Ermenhilde as Eru.

That’s because that’s how I called her once.

After all, isn’t Ermenhilde such a long name? So I gave her something like a nickname. I used a more easy to speak, friendly name.

And— —If Ermenhilde was born as the God Slaying Weapon, as a tool of the Goddess.....I wanted to call her by a name that was different, that would not refer to her as a tool or a weapon. I feel like that was the reason at first....

.....to call her, Eru.

[What happened, Renji?]

“No, it’s nothing.”

Overcome with immense nostalgia for a moment, I quickly shook my head to forget it.

And then, I looked towards Koutarou.

I don't know why he's in my room but there must be a reason if he has appeared in front of me. Well, to be honest, I'll be happier if he came just to have some fun with me.

"Going by the looks of it, it seems you haven't told her yet."(kou)

"Well yeah. I am a coward after all."

"I see. Certainly, it is as you say."

How can I explain it to Ermenhilde?

That you died once, and then was revived. That you have lost a major part of your memories and the original you is already.....

.....if I could just say that, how much more at peace would I be? If I had told that just when she had been revived, it would have been so much easier but even after an year has passed, I still don't know how to tell her that. And above all, our relationship right now isn't bad either. She's not Eru now but Ermenhilde but still, my journey with her is.....

[What are you two talking about?]

"I'll.....explain it to you sometime soon."

After I said that to her, thought still reluctant, she seemed to have understood for now.

“Let’s hope that ‘soon’ of yours comes actually soon.”(kou)

He talked as if he understood everything about me but it did not irritate me at all.

This is the kind of guy he is. He acts as if his future sight tells him everything and will always talk in a roundabout manner but will often end up making mistakes due to that.

And it’ll be the rest of us who’d have to clean up after his mess. His future sight is certainly convenient but it’s definitely not omnipotent. The future is spread infinitely and Koutarou’s eye can only see one of the possible future events out of countless. Whether his ability turns out to be convenient or not depends on how you act on it.

And right now, Koutarou was talking about how I had still not told Ermenhilde, Souichi and the others.....about Eru.

When Eru died, only Utano-san and Koutarou were there after all. Well, fafnir seems to have somewhat realized what has happened as well though.

“You shouldn’t keep so many secrets or you’ll end up like me, someone that makes others unnecessarily cautious around you.”(kou)

“if you know that then fix that personality of yours, you stupid fool.”

“What, but mine is just for fun, Renji-dono.”

Like hell it is, idiot.

I looked at him with a fed up gaze but as if it didn't concern him, he continued sipping his tea normally.

“Seriously.....did you come all the way just to say that to me?”(renji)

“Of course not.”

Giving a stifled laughter, he placed the cup back to the table.

And his heterochromatic eyes looked directly at me.

“It is truly a disappointing thing, Renji-dono, but—.”(kou)

“The only thing disappointing is what's inside that head of yours.”(renji)

“And your face as well.”(kou)

“Shut up, you fake beauty.”

[Are you two actually kids?]

“Men are always kids Ermenhilde, especially at their heart.”(kou)

“Don't lump me in together with you.”(renji)

Giving a sigh, I was about to sip my tea.....realizing that the cup had become empty, I placed it back on the table.

“So, what do you want to say.”(renji)

“umu, right.”

[As usual, when it's you two, the conversation simply doesn't proceed, does it?]

“That's true. I, for one, do not mind such banter but Yuuko-dono is so short tempered that it's troublesome.”(kou)

“Utano-san is, well, yeah.”

In fact, it's great that she at least puts up with your talk even a bit. If it's Aya, there's a danger that she might start firing magic.

“In fact, the last time, I panicked a bit when she actually teleported me away all the way to the Elfreim continent.”

“It's amazing that all you did was panic a bit at that actually.”

If it was me, I'd probably get attacked by some monsters and would be close to dying.

The monsters there are much more specialised with the forest they live in and are filled with creatures that fire things that cause abnormalities like poisoning, paralysis, *etc.*

If you enter those forests without any preparation, even I, who is used to travelling anywhere, would have no confidence in returning back safely.

“But still, I was quite surprised Renji-dono.”

[Surprised?]

“Yes, thanks to you, it seems you will now be responsible for all troublesome things happening here.”

“.....Wha?”

What is he saying so suddenly?

You can't blame to sound stupid like that, can you?

[Don't make such stupid noises. How pathetic.....]

Oh right, I forgot there is one who'd blame me for it, right beside me.

“Well it's the usual for you I guess.”(kou)

“Could you not make it sound like it is completely normal that I have to take

care of every troublesome thing?”(renji)

In the first place, I hate trouble. Isn't those things the Brave's duties?

Yet, Koutarou continued to chuckle at me. Since he has an androgynous looking face, you might mistake him for a girl. Of course, I wouldn't.

“So, what made you surprised?”(renji)

“Your comrade, Renji-dono, the one you're travelling with right now, that's all.”(kou)

“Ah?”

When he said that, the first face that came to me was of Ms Francesca and others but.....I don't really see how they could be involved with some trouble that Koutarou is talking about.

Ms Francesca is a daughter of a noble house but she's just a human. As for Feirona and Mururu, well it's not like I know everything about those two but, I doubt they're someone special.

As if he had sensed my emotions, Koutarou stood up from his chair.

“If you're curious, go and meet Astraera.”(kou)

[Astraera-sama?]

“Yes. She seems to be wanting to talk to you as well for a while.”

“.....”

Unable to reply, I scratched my cheek.

Now that I think about it, for the past one year, after I killed the Demon god.....I haven't met her at all. I was a bit worried about it but at the same time, somehow I found it hard to meet her again.

We have a bit of our own circumstances as well, you see.

“Renji-dono, you will soon have to face Astraera.”(kou)

“It's not like I have been avoiding her or anything though?”

“Oh really?”

“Yeah, that's right, you ex-NEET(hikikomori).”

“Th, that's not related to our conversation right now, is it!?”

Seeing him loose all his façade so easily, as usual, he's super weak to jabs and insults. He hasn't changed, seriously.



But still—Astraera, eh? Trying to recall her, somehow, I couldn't even remember what she looked like properly. Well, I guess after not seeing her for a whole year, it's normal that her face would start to fade away from my memories I guess. It's a bit of sad case to be honest.

She's a beautiful woman with silver hair. Has a bit of bad personality but maybe that's why, I also held some affinity for her.....but, that's all I could remember.

“Well, I'll think about it.”(renji)

But still, there is a bit of awkward feeling in me.

When we were reviving Eru, Ermenhilde, I can still remember what she said. I feel like I should have listened to what she was saying properly.

That's why.....it felt a bit awkward to go and meet her after all this time.

It's not about what she'd say to me. She would simply feel sad seeing me and Ermenhilde right now.

“Renji-dono.”

“Hm?”

“A disaster will occur.”

Saying just those words, Koutarou walked towards the window.

As I looked at his back, petite for a man, walk away, the faint red moonlight shone on his beautiful hair.

“As usual, you can’t talk straight can you?”(renji)

“That’s just my nature after all.”

“So? A disaster, doesn’t sound very gentle.”

“Well ask about it from her. From the woman who knows and understands the abnormality occurring in this world.”

One of the three pillars that created this world and the being worshipped as the Goddess—Astraera.

Speaking of abnormality, I recalled my talk with Utano-san the other day. The changes and stimulation in the movement of monsters. And the fact that the descendants of the Demon God were on the move.

It seems Koutarou really wanted me to meet Astraera. Should I consider him to be just meddlesome or reject him saying that it was none of his concern?

.....a small, really small, I took small sigh that even Ermenhilde wouldn’t notice.

“Renji-dono, I’ll be waiting for you at Elfheim.”

And without even waiting for my answer, Koutarou’s figure slowly started to fade away.....and soon completely disappeared.

Teleportation magic. In this whole world, only he and Utano-san are able to use it.

Elfheim continent, it’s the continent where Demi-humans like Elves and Beastmen live——and the country that is watched over by the Spirit God Zwenelia.

[Renji?]

“nah.....”

Resting my back completely on the chair, I stared at the ceiling.

Why does the world always have to involve me in its troubles? I have had enough of fighting already. Living as an adventurer alone is more than enough for me.

No more——I don’t want to put her in any more danger.

I don’t know how long I kept on staring at the ceiling.

After a while, the door was slightly knocked. On speaking up, a single maid

quietly came in. It was Angela-san.

“Pardon the intrusion.”(angela)

“eh, huh?”

“No, you were the one who.....”

In her hands was a silver tray. And above it was a bottle full of wine along with two glasses.

Oh right, I did say something random like that to send Toudou back to Angela-san, didn't I? Remembering that, as if she had seen through me having forgotten about it, her eyes narrowed.

“Will be you be drinking alone?”(angela)

“No, well, I was thinking of probably inviting someone later.”

“I see.”

Saying that, without making any noise, she placed the wine bottle on the table, Of course, with just one glass.

“Ara?”(angela)

Seeing the two teacups above the table, she voiced her surprise. She must be

aware that no one brought in tea to this room I guess. Above all, there was no teapot. Just two random cups.

“These cups are.....?”(angela)

“A friend of mine was here, just a while ago.”(renji)

“I see...”

Her face showed that she wasn't satisfied with that answer but she didn't ask anything else and quietly cleared the cups away.

It's really great that she doesn't try to pry in at all. And just as she was exiting the room,

“Oh, right,”(angela)

Not with her usual formal way of talking, she spoke in a tone that seemed more gentle.

“Thank you very much.”(angela)

Inside the dark room with only moonlight seeping in , the usual stiff Angelasan gave her thanks with a gentle smile.

And making almost no noise at all, she left after closing the door.

[fumu.]

“It’s seems it went well for them, good good.”

[is that so?]

“Yeah.”

.....Well, this is the same as always. Certainly.

Recalling Koutarou’s words, I thought while musing over it.

Troublesome things, difficult things, it’s all the usual stuff for me.

Souichi ,Utano-san, Toudou and everyone else seemed to be working hard in their own way and enjoying this world. I can’t let anything destroy that.

I opened the wine bottle. As I poured it into the glass, a rich smell came to me.

“It’s pretty lonely to drink alone, seriously.”(renji)

[That’s because you act pretentious for no reason. Since Yuuko and others would be busy with tomorrow’s preparations, want to invite Hiiragi maybe?]

“If I did that, I’ll get kicked not by a horse but by Angela-san directly to hell.”

[Huh, what does that mean?]

“Who knows.”

## Chapter 51: Sword and Sword (1)

“Oi.”

It was still early for the sun to set but maybe because the clouds were thicker than even yesterday, it felt like it was getting dark earlier than usual.

As I continued to stare at the sky, the golden haired woman who was drawing water from the nearby river, looked at me with a fed up gaze. In both her hands were wooden buckets filled to the brim with water.

“Renji-san, thinking about something?”

Another girl, with semi-long black hair came to me to talk as well. It must be imagination that I felt some worry mixed in her voice.

Since I was just dazing around, she might just have found it strange though.

“aah, no.....seems like the weather is going to get worse, that’s all.”

“fumu.”

“Oh, right.”

When I said that, the woman looked at the sky as if she realized that just now.



The black haired girl as well, turned to look at the sky after her.

The wind grew stronger and I felt chilly. The winter, as per the calendar, was still a bit far away but it was already fall/autumn here.

Both me and the girl were wearing thick clothes but the blonde woman was lightly dressed in clothes that looked like the ones you wear to balls/dance parties. But even so, her expression showed no change and it didn't look like she felt cold at all.

Apparently, she uses magic to neutralise both hotness and cold or something like that. I don't really understand well but, sounds pretty convenient.

"Rainy nights get really humid, I don't like it at all."(girl)

"I'm pretty sure it's like that for everyone."

The bonfire goes out due to the rain, sometimes rainwater even seems inside the tent as well. In summers, it gets humid and in winters, it gets cold enough that you could freeze to death. And above all, the rain hides the sound of footsteps of monsters and beats and removes their tracks so it gets really troublesome. In a sense, to adventurers, rain was their natural enemy.

"Do you hate rain?"

Looking at me as I thought of such things, the blonde woman asked me that.

Seeing her clear jade coloured eyes and beautiful looks, and her defenceless

expression that no one would even think of being suspicious of, I gave a sigh.

But when I did, getting worried of why I sighed, she only brought her face even closer.

The only reason that my gaze always goes towards her soft-looking lips must be because we have been travelling for a long time now.

“Too close.”

When I muttered that, the blonde woman’s eyes slightly narrowed.

“It’s not something you should worry about after all this time, is it?”

Being told that with an almost tired sounding voice, somehow I was the one who felt bad suddenly.

If I had to say, it’s this woman’s fault for having such a defenceless expression, right?

“So, what were you thinking about?”(woman)

“muu.”

Behind the blonde woman, the black haired girl puffed her cheeks.....well she didn’t look as cute as it sounds as she sent a sharp glare towards me. She’s like a bed of thorns, seriously.

“Nothing, was just thinking about how rain makes it feel so gloomy. Not to mention, all the troubles we have to go through for setting the camp. What about you, Aya?”

“.....I, as well, don't like it much.”

While taking one of the water buckets from the woman, I looked towards the girl.

Was she not expecting me to turn the conversation towards her; she seemed to get stuck for words a bit and replied somewhat timidly.

Did she find the girl's reaction to be suspicious? As the blonde woman's attention shifted from me towards the girl.

Thank god for that. While thinking that, I started to walk as the wind blew once again.

The girl's black hair, as she walked along with the blonde woman, swayed in the air. It's been about one year since we have come to this world.

Compared to when we had come here, the girl's hair seem to have grown quite a lot. Her hair, still a bit short to need tying up, along with her looks increasingly emphasized her growing from a girl but not yet a full woman.

“What is it?”

I must have been in a daze again when that woman-like yet man-like voice resounded in my head.

Looking towards her, surprisingly, she was looking at me as well. The girl beside her was blushing slightly.

“umm, did something happen?”(aya)

“You were staring at Aya, what’s wrong?”

Apparently, I had been unknowingly staring directly at the girl.

No, I shook my head.

“Just thinking that your hair really has grown quite a bit, that’s all.”(renji)

“Eh?”

When I said that, the girl held her own hair and brought it in front of her own eyes to see. Thinking how cute she looked as she did that, I once again fixed my grip on the water bucket.

“Do you prefer smaller…….”(aya)

“Hm?”

Unable to hear the last bit, I asked her to repeat but she simply continued to

look down. But just when I decided to walk back to the campsite.....

“Renji, do you prefer women with shorter hair?”

“Wai, Ermenhilde-san?!”(aya)

“Ohh.”

The blonde woman spoke that, helping the girl.

I see, so that’s what she had asked.

“Well, let’s see, I can’t really say.”

When I gave a shrug, the black haired girl moved around her gaze trying to hide her embarrassment. Was it really that embarrassing to say?

I thought that but I guess, women and men both must find different things to be important.

But still, the blonde woman, who is supposedly the same gender as the girl, seemed to be confused seeing the girl’s reaction.

“I don’t really understand. Is the length of your hair supposed to be something important?”

Saying that she held her own hair.

Though her hair is mostly tied behind her back so you can't really tell its full length but the hair on the side of her head weren't tied and going by that, it should be very long.

"So, what is it?"(eru)

"Hm?"(renji)

"Hair. Do you prefer short hair?"

"You're really talkative today aren't you?"

Even though normally she wouldn't even pay attention to things like these.

Was the length of hair really that important to her now?

"Renji, I am your possession. There is a need to look the way you find the most pleasing."

"No, there no such need."

I instantly rejected her words.

I really did not like how this woman would prioritize me over herself. You should learn to treat yourself more preciously.

Well, even like this, this is much better than how she was back when we met. But still, I really hope she learns to give preference to her own opinions rather than mine. Well, we'll change it slowly and steadily as we travel, I guess.

While I was thinking of that, the black haired girl who had not taken part in the conversation continued to stare at me.

"What is it?"(renji)

".....it's nothing."

And after a while, she gave a pout and averted her gaze. Maybe I worsened her mood by talking only to the blonde woman. Even though she looks more like an adult, as expected her thinking is still, suitable to her age, like that of a child's.

"So, Renji, what do you prefer, long hair or short hair?"

"I like both. Basically, it depends on the whether it suits the person or not."

"I see."

If I had to choose, I do prefer long hair. But it was a bit embarrassing to say it out loud.

When I said that while pretending that I didn't care much about it, the woman put her finger to her lips. Whenever she is thinking of something, this woman has a habit of doing that.

And, the black haired girl, I don't know what she was thinking, continued to give small glances towards me. Aah, even understanding what she wanted to say seemed a bit troublesome in such a situation.

"Ah——"

"Then, Renji, does my hair suit me?"(eru)

I'm sure she didn't think much on it. The moment she came to this conclusion, she spoke up. I'm sure that's all it was.

But still, it feels a bit wrong to speak like that while covering what the girl was about to say. Though the girl's expression as she panicked having become unable to say anything seemed cute as well, she also looked a bit pitiful.

But oh well, I couldn't really help her here and could only give a wry smile for now.

"I think it suits you."(renji)

"I see."

See, I told you.

She didn't think any further than that. There was no change in her even after I said that. She simply continued to twirl and play with her hair, that's all. Since she started walking away as well, I couldn't see her expression either.



“C’mon, let’s go back as well.”(renji)

“.....”

The girl kept a slightly discontent yet wanting to say something-like expression and stood there for a while.

But the girl as well, quickly matched pace with the woman and started walking. As usual, I ended up having to follow them, walking slightly behind those two as always. I wonder why I felt a bit lonely at that.

After walking a bit, the wind blew again.

Aah, it’s really cold, seriously.

Thinking back now, this might be the first time she asked something related to herself, something unrelated to her mission, I think.

.

[What happened, Renji?]

“Hm? Aah.”

Somehow, I felt neither sleepy nor tired.

In fact, after quite a while, I felt well awake and conscious even though I just woke up.

.....Enough to even recall the dream I just saw.

[What happened?]

“No, just, saw a dream, that’s all.”

[A dream?]

“Yeah.”

Unable to even speak of what I saw, I shook my head.

Getting up from the bed, I looked towards the window. It must be clear weather outside as the sunlight seemed to pass through even the curtains. It felt quite warm even though it was winter. Today, we’ll have a pretty good weather as well it seems.

[You alright?]

It seems like I continued to be in a slight daze like that, as Ermenhilde asked that in a worried voice.

“Yeah. I think I just didn’t get enough sleep maybe.”

[Seriously. Did you drink too much last night? How pathetic.....]

“Don’t say that. Drinking is one of my only few enjoyments in life, you know?”

[I’m saying don’t drink too much. I’m not telling you to not drink at all.]

So harsh, seriously.

While listening to Ermenhilde, I ended up giving a wry smile. I didn’t really intend to drink too much but I’m sure anyone else would have said the same thing.

Just then, my door was knocked. When I rose up from my bed and gave an answer, the door was opened and Aya peeked in from behind the door and, confirming that I was awake, came in. Unlike inside my dream, her long hair had been tied to the side and her face looked more mature than that time as well. Comparing the Aya back then to the one now, I became unable to say anything. I felt that it’d be rude.

Without realizing what I was thinking, Aya came to me with a bright expression. Behind her, Souichi and Yayoi-chan also came. It looks like the childhood friends trio was having fun together today as usual.

Aya and yayoi-chan won’t be taking part in the individual battles so they were in their school academy uniforms. But Souichi was in his travelling/fighting clothes that I was used to seeing.

Wearing thick and solid looking clothes, he had a undecorated sword on his waist.

“What happened?”(renji)

“We heard your voice inside so thought of inviting you for breakfast.”

“I see.”

Was it time for breakfast already?

Thinking that, I was about to get up but realized that I was still in my pajamas.

“Sorry, I just woke up.”(renji)

“As usual, you’re weak in the mornings when you sleep on beds, eh?”

“For some reason, yeah. Even though I’d be fine not even sleeping at all when we’re outside camping.”(renji)

Especially the beds in the castle are so soft that its actually troublesome. Maybe because the maids dry them everyday, they always smell nice as well.

The three of them didn’t really mind the way I looked right now but Aya alone slightly averted her gaze with red cheeks.

“What is it, Aya-chan?”

“Ueh!?”

Realizing Aya’s reaction, yayoi-chan said that to her to tease her.

But still Aya, what was that sound you just made?

I didn’t say it but realizing my gaze, she blushed even more. And Yayoi-chan teased her even more.

“As usual, you guys get along well.”(renji)

“Not really though.”

Souichi said that in a tired voice as he continued to move around his arm and shoulder as if his joints were aching.

It looked stupid but I guess he must be trying to appeal to how tired he was. Seeing Souichi’s actions, Aya turned to him hoping to save herself from teasing.

“What, want to say something to me?(aya)

“Oh no, nothing at all..”

[.....the way you’re talking is a bit weird Souichi.]

I'm guessing something must have happened after he lost to Masaki-chan yesterday. I could easily imagine what had happened making me realize that I, as well, have been with these three for quite a while now.

"Don't bully onii-chan too much, Aya-chan." (yayoi)

"I'm not bullying him. In the first place, it's Souichi's fault. Why did he have to use Zwenelia's power there?" (aya)

"I, I didn't do it on purpose, it just happened. I couldn't help it!" (souichi)

"Learn to control yourself then. Even Masaki-san didn't use her demonic swords, did she?"

"uu....."

I don't really care but don't come to my room in the morning only to fight. Well, it's lively so I don't really hate it though. Seeing them quarrel like that only makes me smile anyway. Normally, with childhood friends and brothers and sisters, they grow more and more apart as they get older after all.

At least in my case, only few of my friends from my childhood were in touch with me after we were in our twenties.

That's why, seeing these three get along so well only made me feel warm inside.

"Well, Aya-chan seemed to be working hard for an impure motive

though.”(yayoi)

“Wha, what are you saying, yayoi!?”9aya)

Aya was continuing to scold Souichi but with just one word from Yayoi-chan, the tables instantly turned.

[Impure motives?]

Ermenhilde had been silent with me till now but she spoke there.

When she did, as if she had been waiting for someone to ask, Yayoi-chan looked towards me and Ermenhilde with a wide smile. Even though normally she acts like sheltered noble girl, when its just these three.....Actually, both Aya and Yayoi-chan instantly show their true faces when they are alone with people they are comfortable with.

“Right, right. You know Aya-chan was.....”(Yayoi)

“Waahh!!”

Yayoi-chan was about to say something but Aya quickly moved to block her mouth and Yayoi-chan ran around trying to avoid her.

My room that had been quiet just a while ago had become so lively all of a sudden. At least don't jump around like that will you? Your uniform skirts are really short.

“Renji-niichan, sorry.”(souichi)

I wonder what he thought of this as Souichi bowed his head in apology to me.

“Why?”

“Well, for being so noisy.....”

“Ha. Don’t worry about it. I don’t hate it when it’s lively like this.”

When I grinned while saying that, Souichi laughed as well.

“If you guys are having fun, I’m fine with it.”

“.....I still feel sorry for you though.”

“I said don’t worry, didn’t I?”

[That’s right, Souichi. Adults are supposed to spoil children like this.]

“No, but I’m not a child anymore, Eru-san.”

[Really?]

“If you were a bit more taller then maybe.”(renji)



“guh..You hit right where it hurts the most.”(souichi)

After talking like that for a while, the door was knocked on again.

This time, without even waiting for my reply, the door was opened up.

“As usual, this place is always so lively.”

“Well, I don’t feel like it has been like that way for quite some while now for you to say ‘as usual’ though?”(renji)

The one who had peeked while saying that was Masaki-chan.

It seems she was filled with energy from morning as usual as she was wearing not her uniform but her lightweight equipment she uses.

“Good morning, everyone.”(masaki)

“Ah, morning, Masaki-san.”

“Good morning, Masaki-san.”

“.....Good Morning.”

All four had their own way of greeting. Masaki-chan and Souichi were frank as usual. Aya who politely bowed as she greeted and Yayoi-chan who was at least smiling on the surface. For a second, I felt like sparks flew between Masaki-chan

and Yayoi-chan but.....even if this world is a fanatsy world, this must have been my imagination.

Well, it's not like these two are on bad terms or anything either.....As long as it doesn't concern Souichi, that is.

In fact if Souichi is not involved, I feel Yayoi-chan and Masaki-chan are on as good terms as the childhood friends trio themselves.

It's that. They want the person they like to notice only them, or something like that.

"Morning, Masaki-chan."

"Good morning, Yamada-san."

She greeted me with pleasant smile as well.

Umu.

I wonder if this was a man's instinct that I automatically went slightly on guard just by seeing the slight sparks between Masaki-chan and Yayoi-chan.

Souichi beside me as well, looked like his face was cramping a bit.

"I'll be in your care today."(masaki)

“That’s my line. Please go easy on me okay?”(renji)

“fufu.”

It’s actually more scarier if you laugh there you know. Recalling Souichi and Masaki-chan’s fight yesterday, I could already feel my face stiffening up.

I could barely even follow what was happening. It’d be really difficult for me to even be able to receive this girl’s attacks.

“hm?”

“It’s nothing.”

As if she knew my thoughts, she looked at me with an innocent, harmless smile. This damn sadist.

“But still, aren’t you a bit late to wake up now?”

“Can’t help it. I had a guest yesterday.”

“A guest? In this empty room?”

“I had alcohol.”

Saying that, I looked towards the table set in the room and the empty bottle lying on it.

Seeing that, both Souichi and Masaki-chan gave a sigh together.

“Is alcohol really that tasty?”

“More like, it calms me down?”(renji)

“Isn’t that being over dependant on it.....”

“It’s not that bad.”(renji)

Probably. Their gazes actually hurt.

[See. That’s how people look at you.]

“...Nuu.”(renji)

I looked at the medal lying near my pillow but the voice inside my head sounded like it had won already.

[I am not saying that stop drinking but at least reduce the amount, will you?]

“But it’s one of my only enjoyments.”(renji)

[Swing your sword like you did long ago. If you started moving your body and work hard, you’d get more sound sleep than by drinking.]

Aah, my ears hurt.

“Well, Eru-san is.....correct, I guess.”

“Yeah.”

“I have no allies here.”(renji)

Goddamnit all.

While I was thinking of complaining about this to Toudou or Utano-san, Aya who had been playing around with Yayoi-chan looked towards me.

She stopped following yayoi-chan around, and stood beside Masaki-chan.

“Who was the guest?”(aya)

“Oh, does that worry you Aya-chan?”(yayoi)

Behind Aya, Yayoi-chan spoke to her close enough that it looked like she was whispering in her ears.

“Ah, mouu, Yayoi stay quiet for a while!”(aya)

“fufu, okaay ~”(yayoi)

They really are on such good terms.

While thinking that, I looked at Aya.

“It was Koutarou.”(renji)

“———fuun.”

Her, though angry yet having fun expression instantly changed to a cold one resembling that of a lake’s surface.

Ooh, scary.

Souichi beside me, silently, but definitely shivered once.

“What did he say?”(aya)

“Nothing much. It was about work.”(renji)

So Aya’s hate for Koutarou has already come to this stage.

Well, his personality is definitely one that will never be found tolerable by some kinds of people. But still, I could clearly see her face hold definite displeasure.

[What's wrong, Aya.]

"No, nothing. As usual, he's doing something weird, eh?"(aya)

[Him being weird is nothing new. That aside, why did you become so sullen just now?]

"I am not being sullen Eru."(aya)

That's obviously because Koutarou and Aya are like oil and water. Well, if I point that out the sparks would reach even me so I'll stay quiet though.

And as usual unable to understand that, I pitied my partner who could still not learn how to read the mood. Or maybe should I pity Koutarou for being treated as a weirdo by even Ermenhilde.

Well, let's pity them both. That's not going to change anything though.

"But, that's rare. For Koutarou-san to come here."

"Really?"

"Un. He shows up at Yuuko-san's place once in a while but even I haven't met him in quite a while."

When Souichi said that, I looked towards Masaki-chan next.

“Same here. In the end that man doesn’t meet anyone other than those who play along with him or those who he needs to meet no matter what.”(masaki)

“Yeah, that sounds true.”(yayoi)

It seems he hasn’t shown himself to Masaki-chan either.

Going by Yayoi-chan’s words, he hasn’t met her either. And I didn’t even need to ask Aya.

“Well, in any case. That was that. Also, I want to change now so could you guys leave now?”(renji)

“Ah, sorry.”

When I said that, Souichi apologised as everyone’s representative.

“Well then, we’ll save a seat for you at dining hall.”

“Oh, please do. You don’t have to wait for me to eat though.”(renji)

“It’s fine. We’ll wait.”

Like I said, you don’t have to.

As I waved towards Souichi and the others as they left.....I called Aya before she left.



“Aya.”

“yes?”

What did I want to say?

——I recalled the dream I saw this morning.

“Your height.”

“.....yes?”

“It’s grown.”

It seems she didn’t understand what I said as she left while tilting her head in confusion.

Well, that was way too out of context I guess.

[Just when I thought what you were going to say, what was that?]

I also felt an unexplainable atmosphere leaking from Ermenhilde as well.

If she had a body, I’m sure she’d be looking at me with a cold gaze that’d make me torment with guilt.

“Don’t worry about it, it’s the usual.”

[Yeah, I guess so.]

It’s painful to actually not be refuted when I said that.

AS I sighed while changing my clothes, Ermenhilde gave a sigh at me as well.  
I’ll cry, damnit.

“Just,”

[Just what?]

“.....She was taller than the Aya I saw in my dreams, that’s all.”

[Houu.]

When I said that, this time she made an amused voice that resounded in my head.

[So you saw Aya in your dreams?]

“.....something like that.”

Not just her alone.

But I don't have to say that, do I?

Really, that's all.

The Aya in my dreams was slightly shorter than now. Her hair was shorter as well, and the way she talked, her expressions, all were slightly different than the present Aya.

But——

“Haah.”

[fufu. I'll tell this to Aya later.]

“wah.....sounds amusing, I guess.”

[Well Renji will be at the centre of it after all.]

What kind of face would Eru inside my dreams make?

I, before I realized, had started to forget how she looked.

“Say, Ermenhilde.”

[What is it?]

Her voice sounded like she was really enjoying this.

Hearing her, I felt a bit more pleasant as well.

“Whether Utano-san or Aya, if I——”

Saying till that, I shut up once again.

Recently, I feel like the things I couldn't say to Ermenhilde till the end seems to have increased.

Was it because I had not told everything to my partner, to Ermenhilde, like before?

[What was that about Yuuko and Aya?]

“It's nothing.”

I finished changing my clothes.

They weren't some high class clothes that nobles would wear. It as thick shirt and trousers that I wear while travelling. Putting the mithril sword on my waist, I fixed the iron knife on the back of my belt.

[I see.]

Her voice, was still pleasant and cheerful.

She, even when I don't speak everything, won't say anything.

Even if I chose Utano-san or Aya——I'm sure, she'd give me her blessing.

—

“” You will soon have to face Astraera.””

—

That bastard, saying that to me so easily.

Not showing my emotions on my face, I picked up Ermenhilde lying near my pillow, and flicked the medal with my thumb.

With a dry sound, it twirled in the air and fell into my palm.

“Heads, eh?”

[Looks like luck will be on your side today.]

Her bright, cheerful voice made my heart feel lighter.

## Chapter 52: Sword and Sword (2)

Handing over my mithril sword to the soldier standing in front of the waiting room, I slipped inside the room.

Inside, there were at least 20 people sitting on chairs or passing time in different ways. Some were checking the sword provided to them by holding it up towards the sunlight while some were in deep concentration with their eyes closed and some were talking to acquaintances.

To stay as far as possible from them, I sat down on the chair nearest to the wall which didn't stand out at all.

“haah.”

[What's wrong?]

“I'm starting to feel nervous.”

[.....I should be the one sighing right now.]

While hearing Ermenhilde's usual fed up voice, I saw a few more participants enter the room a little while after I did.

A tall man with bright red hair, tanned skin and a face that looked truly like a mercenary, along with a short heighted guy who was probably the other one's

lucky.

And another familiar person that seemed to be in some sort of quarrel/argument with those two. A woman, dressed far more beautifully than those two, in a blue robe——Ms Francesca. It seems we were in the same waiting room.

It seems she was able to get quite a good rest yesterday as her face looked fresh. But, she seemed to be troubled by the other two. Her usual gentle smile seemed to be stiffening up somewhat.

But still, that red haired merc wasn't really taller than Ms Francesca. Well, she is pretty taller than the average women of this world after all. Yet, that man looked much bigger than her mostly because he was wearing full armour over his big muscles unlike her.

“I'd overpowered completely if I had to fight someone like that.”

[Only if you stupidly attack him head-on though.]

That's true I guess. Well, I probably won't have to fight him though.

But still, it feels so much more at ease when even one of your acquaintances is here. Seeing Ms Francesca here, I felt myself relax a bit.

It seems Souichi and Masaki-chan were in the other waiting room so I was feeling a bit a lonely.

[They seem to be in some kind of argument, you know?]

“yeah, I can see that.”

She still hasn't noticed me yet. Not knowing how to handle this, she seemed to be simply trying to return a smile somehow. Even her voice when refuting seemed somewhat weak.

Judging by that, the man would probably not fall back at all. In fact, he seemed to be almost enjoying it.

When dealing with such types of guys, it's a bit problematic to instantly go against them and provoking them even more as well but if you don't stand strong you would let them get cocky. Especially, in front of a timid woman.

“How lively.”

[How about asking that man if he could share half of his energy with you?]

“fumu, that might be interesting.”

[.....haah.]

Looking at guys like those, you might not be wrong to feel that all mercenaries are rough and rude like that man, I feel.

But I know that not all are like that. But just because there's one guy like that,



all of them get a bad reputation.

Though the room was never silent, but their presence made the room all the more noisy. Maybe he found the noise to be actually nice, he started to speak even louder and rougher.

[Not going to help her?]

“Hmm, what should I do?”

Saying that, I continued to look at Ms Francesca.

I wonder if she'll able to get rid of him by herself? If it seems impossible, I'll just go up and talk to her directly but for now, I continued to watch the situation.

Things like these turn to be good experience as well, sometimes. If you were to live as a noble, there won't be much chances to interact much with mercenaries but the possibility is not zero. After all, nobles hold land and to protect that land from monsters, you have to hire mercs sometimes.

It would be better to know what kind of people consist of mercs. On concentrating to hear them a bit better, I came to know that the red haired man was actually Ms Francesca's opponent in the first round.

Judging by his body movements, he should be pretty skilled as well. His weapon was a large sword, just like Ms Francesca's previous opponent yesterday. There was a two-hand sword with almost no decorations resting on his back. That said, it's not like he'd use that one in the tournament as well.

He'd probably have to use one of the large swords prepared by the authorities for the tournament. Though Ms Francesca has gained some experience of fighting against large swords in her previous battle.....this time, her opponent is a person who has fighting as his job, literally, and not a student. He'd be in a completely different level from the student, or the fighters who underestimated her in the round 1 and 2 of the team tournament.

While speaking to Ms Francesca, the man also kept on sending glares towards the rest of the participants in the room. And some did avert their gazes at that as well.

He was bragging about how he was confident of his victory. I guess, he must have a lot of confidence in his own skills to talk like that.

But this was the waiting room of the Coliseum. It would be best to keep those words deep in your heart and was better to show it through results. All he was doing right now was garnering animosity.

[Hou..That man sure seems pretty confident of his victory.]

"It'd be great if he could."

[.....Should you be saying that?]

Even Ermenhilde reacted to that man's words. Her words seem to entice me by implying that 'He's planning to win against you as well, Renji.' But since she didn't say that out loud, I'm gonna pretend I didn't get her.

In the first place, he has to first fight Ms Francesca before me. It's as if

Emenhilde's saying that Ms Francesca would definitely lose to that man.

Well, I can't deny that she does seem to be at a disadvantage against that man.

"Ahn!?"

Did he hear my voice as I responded to Ermenhilde, the red haired man looked towards me. He seemed to be quite angry as well.

Alongside him, Ms Francesca made a surprised face as well as she hid her mouth with her hand. As expected of a beauty, she looked great even while making such a face.

But still, how the hell did that man even hear me?

The man claimed that he'd win and I said that it'd be great if he could.

.....I didn't really mean it in an instigating kind of way but it definitely sounds like I did. Probably because recently Feirona and others have started to talk to Ermenhilde as well, I grown a bit lax with my mouth. I'm pretty sure noone other than me and Ms Francesca heard Ermenhilde here.

"Ah, I wasn't really making fun of you. I'll apologise if you were offended."(renji)

[Why do you have to.....um, wasn't there a better way to say it?]

Before he could saying anything, let's apologise first. 'After all it'd be embarrassing to say something like 'I have a habit of talking to myself'.

And above all, it's no use stirring up trouble here. If tournament committee member, Utano-san, got a wind of it and decided to warn us, it won't end well.....Though I feel like I'd be the only who'll get scolded.

Well in any case, even this guy wouldn't want to face that in front of so many people.

That's what I thought but I guess the red haired merc really didn't find it amusing at all.

He must have thought that he had been made a fool of as he walked towards me with force that as if he was trying to make the earth rumble. As he kicked away the table that was in his way, the participants looked at me with irritated gazes.....It's not like this is my fault, is it?

"Didn't you just say something really funny?"(redhair)

He stood right in front of me.

His height wasn't much different than mine but since I was sitting, it ended up with him looking down at me.

He looked like an enraged beast making me confused in deciding how to reply.

But to him, not saying anything must have irritated him even more as he punched the wall I was resting my back on. To have not grimaced even at that, he must be pretty well trained.

“Sorry. I wasn’t really trying to make you angry.”

“Aahn!?”

[Couldn’t you just beat him down right here, right now?]

I’ll be the one who’d end up getting beaten, I feel like. I guess his attitude must be really irritating for Ermenhilde. Well, it’s the same for me as well though.

Even though the tournament was about to start, why do I have to go through something this in the waiting room?

His arm that was currently right beside my face was thicker than even mine. But not in the fatty, unhealthy way. It was truly well trained, muscled arm. My response must have seemed really irritating to him as even blood vessels were popping out on his arm.

Even though the ones I truly enjoy teasing are Ermenhilde, Ms Francesca and Souichi only who give really funny reactions.

“Oi, can you not hear me!?!?”

“I can.”(renji)

But still, your face is too close.

I feel like his spit would come on me which would be disgusting.

It seems my feelings showed on my face as he got even more angry with a red face. The other participants, though had full attention towards us, acted like it didn't concern them and didn't try to help me out at all.

I feel like crying, seriously. But, oh well, if it was me in their place, I'd act the same though.

"C'mon, the tournament is close right? Why don't you try and rest your body a bit?"(renji)

"Hah! As if I'd lose to a brat like that. The [Hero]'s disciple? Haha, sounds like the best opponent to raise my fame."

[Is what he says.]

"No, like I have said a countless time, I have not taught her anything that would make her my disciple, you know....."

Saying that, I gave a sigh.

But then, suddenly, everyone in the room suddenly went silent. What now? It feels so awkward suddenly.

“Then, you are.....?”(redhair)

“Well. My name isn’t ‘you’ so I don’t know who you’re referring to though.”

Only at times like these, my titles come handy. Since my face wasn’t known rumours seemed to have spread quite a lot and it was pretty effective on such random people who try to pick a fight for no reason. This world isn’t made of societies that are advanced in information tech like my previous one and is based more around your own merits and abilities.

As the human who killed the threat that put the world in chaos, the [Demon God]; just that fact alone made others put me on a higher level than their own. Now, as long as I don’t cower too much, like I was right now, it’s more than enough.

“Ms Francesca, how’s your condition?”(renji)

“Ah, yes. I was able to sleep well yesterday.”

“That’s great.”

Averting my gaze from the red haired man, I turned towards Ms Francesca, who was looking at our interchange along with the small heighted man. Looking closely, that man was actually even shorter than Ms Francesca. Well, she really is taller than average though.

“That was misfortunate, eh?”(renji)

“No.....”(fran)

As I moved away without even meeting my eyes with the red haired man, he simply stepped away making a awkward face. And the short heighted lacky ran away following after him.

I felt like my life span reduced a bit getting threatened like that by heavy muscular man like that one. Since I did something I wasn't used to, I felt even more tired. Resting my back towards the wall, I sat down beside Ms Francesca.

“Haah. The participants in this tournament sure are hot blooded.”(renji)

[You're one of those participants as well though?]

“All of my blood was drained away a year back already.”

[Haah.]

While listening to Ermenhilde's sigh, I turned towards Ms Francesca.

Maybe because she was a bit nervous, her expression was slightly stiff. There was than red haired man's case as well. I hope she doesn't get too affected by this. Maybe, it could be that Ms Francesca might not have much immunity against men other than me and Feirona. And even with us, even though we have travelled quite a bit together, I have not heard her make any light/frivolous talk with any of us.



“You okay?”(renji)

“Yes. What about you Renji-sama.....”

“I feel like I am about to get crushed from just the pressure.”

[You’re still saying that? How pathetic.]

“fufufu.”

As I spoke such foolish things, Ms Francesca gave a small laugh. Seeing her in a good mood, I also gave a smile as I stood up.

There’s still time till my turn but I should go and choose my weapon already.

“Today, you are not in your armour?”(fran)

“Hm?”

“Yesterday, you were in full armour while with the king, were you not?”

“My fighting style depends more on moving around swiftly rather than holding my ground in one place with heavy armour after all.”

“Well, I know that but.....”

I guess, I really do look stronger when in armour.

Well, I guess there's no one else who'd take part in the tournament wearing nothing but normal clothes just for the heck of it. But this isn't a game after all. It's better to rely on your most trusted way of fighting. Even if you get strong armour or weapon, in the end the thing you can rely on the most is your own body.

[She seems pretty worried for you, you know?]

"Ah, no, how can my worries be.."(fran)

".....So you don't get worried for me at all?"

"No, it's.....that's not what I-!"

Well, that'd be sad in its own way but seeing her getting all flustered and embarrassed, I felt calmed down.

But still, since others couldn't hear Ermenhilde, it'll look like Ms Francesca was getting embarrassed while talking to me. I wonder what others are thinking.

"Don't tease her too much."(renji)

[Aren't you the one who's always teasing her though?]

“I’m allowed to.”

“This isn’t fair, Renji-sama.....”(fran)

Ignoring all that, I decided to help Ms Francesca get out of her embarrassment. Her neckline, that’s normally hidden with her hair was currently visible as her hair were tied back with a ribbon and I could see her porcelain white skin clearly tinged in a red shade.

As I gave a small laugh seeing that, I felt like Ms Francesca’s skin became even redder probably because she heard it.

“Ms francesca, what about your weapon?”

“Eh, AH, Ah, I, my weapon is..”

When I asked that trying to change the topic, she looked towards the short sword at her waist.

In a panic she tried to hold it but instead almost dropped it down.

It seems she’s going to use that sword today as well. Going by her match yesterday, that sword wasn’t really very dependable. That said, it’d be useless to change her sword right now as she won’t get used to using the new one so fast.

I wouldn’t care much since it’s me and Mururu on the front lines but when it’s one on one, I felt like her sword was slightly lacking.

“Will you be fine?”

“I have had this with me from the start of my journey after all.”

[I see. So that sword is your partner, eh?]

“.....even though you get angry when I say that.”(renji)

[fufu. It's not like that.]

Liar.

While I said that inside my mind, Ms Francesca gave a laugh as well.

Done with that, I walked towards the weapons kept in the room while scratching my head.

There were others choosing weapons as well but they all gave way for me. I guess I stood out a bit too much due to that red haired guy.

While feeling a bit awkward, I picked up an orthodox double-edge straight sword. It's blade has been dulled but it's length and width was close to the mithril sword I had been carrying around for the past few days.

After that, I tried a few more but the one I chose first seemed to be the easiest to use. Thinking that, I attached it to my waist.

When, the red haired man came beside me. Does he have something more to say, I looked at him but he silently looked at the weapons and picked up a heavy looking large sword.

In terms of just pure strength, I'm pretty sure I'd lose to him.

"Heroes, are pretty thin huh."

"Hm?"(renji)

"I said, you're pretty thin."

It seems he realized that I was looking at his muscles.

But still, to be called thin.....

"How nostalgic."(renji)

"Huh?"

"No, it's nothing."

I recalled being told that so many times back in the past.

Normally, I think people gain quite a bit of muscle when they train a lot but

for some reason, I had a constitution that didn't let me gain much muscles.

It's not like I have none. But it's not like this man or O'brien-san who focus on strength unlike me and Masaki-chan who focus on speed. It's that kind of difference but well, as a man, it's pretty envious to not have a muscular body.

At least, I was envious before because I remember specifically training just to gain some more muscle.

That said I never did gain more muscle than what was required for me to swing a sword properly.

"I, will defeat your disciple."

"Is that so? Good luck."

Having chosen my sword, I turned my back at him.

I could feel his bloodlust making my expression almost go stiff. If it was the past me, the actually really thin me, I would honestly be shivering right now.

But still, oh well. It feels weird to say that I've gotten to used to feeling bloodlusts now.

"Then, will you fight me as well?"

"hah?"(renji)

But, while I was mocking my own self, he said something like that in an excited voice.

I ended up turning reflexively only to see him stare with a cool gaze.

“You’re really thin.”

“I heard that before.”(renji)

“In the past, I used to think that you’d be a bigger guy.”

“Is that so? Well, sorry for being thin.”

He’s probably talking about the time when we were still on our journey. Maybe back then, we might have met somewhere. I have no memory of that though. I have literally met hundreds and thousands of mercenaries while travelling after all. If I wasn’t really close with them, I won’t recall who was who.

But still, he sure is not holding himself back.

He’s probably strong.....even more than Ms Francesca maybe. I could feel it from his confidence and way of talking.

[You just got told.]

“I’m used to it.”

[Like I said, couldn't you change that? Like by showing your skill, or that you're actually pretty amazing after all or something like that.]

Ermenhilde, unusually, tried to tease me a bit.

It's probably not just my imagination that her voice seemed a bit worried as well. As usual, she's easy to understand.

"Your ability is not something you have to talk about. The ones who would decide how skilled I am are the spectators."

[fufu, that's true.]

"Saying that you're strong only to lose later is nothing but shameful."

Even I would be unable to bear such an embarrassment.

[I think only Renji can handle that much talk-down without getting angry.]

"I just don't really care about it."

[Though I do think you should care a bit.]

".....seriously."



As I returned back to Ms Francesca after choosing my sword, she was currently in the process of retying her hair with her ribbon.

Her beautiful golden hair were tied behind her back and then flowed down in a single bunch. Since I had seen her in any other hairstyle other than with her usual loose open hair, it felt really fresh.

It's amazing how much a woman can change just from changing their hairstyle.

While I was thinking that, her gaze turned towards me. Her pure white skin at her neck almost felt too dazzling to see.

"Is something wrong?" (fran)

'Nah, just thinking that I haven't seen that ribbon of yours before.'

"Ah, yesterday, Mururu-chan and Feirona-san chose it for me."

[I see.]

Along with Ermenhilde, I said 'I see' as well.

The colour contrast between her white ribbon and golden hair mixed to turn into a gentle colour making those who looked at it feel calm. It's amazing that Feirona and Mururu actually knew what to chose that would suit her best.

But still,

“It really suits you.”(renji)

“Really? Thank you.”

[Yeah. It looks great on you.]

“Yes. I got a ribbon that matched Mururu-chan’s hair and in return I bought her a golden ribbon that matched mine.”

“Wait, that’s weird.”(renji)

“Eh?”

She got that ribbon as a reward for her performance in the team tournament right? Is it okay to gift something back for that.....?

Well, if she’s happy then I have no right to say anything.

“I see.”(renji)

[Even a beastwoman, who has lived only half age of what Renji has, is more resourceful than Renji.]

“you, where the hell did you learn to talk like that?”

Why is it that her voice, that was worried for me just a while ago had now turned into a sharp cold blade?

Well true, long hair would be in the way when fighting and even when living on as an adventurer, or even as living as a noble, a ribbon is very good gift I think.....but, why do I feel so left out?

No, well, recently I have been really busy so I haven't been able to meet Feirona and others much either so I can't really complain.

It is kind of my fault but.....somehow, I feel a bit bad for doing that. I felt my face go stiff from the slight guilt of having not met them at all for the past few days.

"What's wrong, Renji-sama?"

"—nah.."

[haah.]

And once again, my partner gave a very human-like sigh. How many times is she going to sigh in just one day?

"As expected, my partner can only be you, Ermenhilde."

[Is that so?]

My partner's voice was cold.

Hearing our talk, ms Francesca gave a giggle.

“As usual, you two are really close huh”(fran)

“.....Eh?”(renji)

[.....]

Just that single word alone made Ermenhilde's mood become even worse.  
Well, I knew this'd happen though

But if I could get Ms Francesca to laugh like this, I'd even happily bow down to Ermenhilde later.

Her nervousness seems to have disappeared completely now. And the smile she had right now was the same she showed when she was completely relaxed while we were travelling together.

At times like these, Mururu's company would have suited her better but if I were to let a non-participant in here, it'd only look like I was abusing my status and authority.

In the first place, I hate standing out like that. Not to mention, it'd only cause more trouble towards Ms Francesca as well.

“It’d be nice if my sword could talk like Ermenhilde-sama as well.”(fran)

“Really? I have to bear with her nitpicking you know?”

[That’s because you’re undisciplined.]

“Well, it is a plus that it’s not lonely even when alone.”

[Muu.]

“Ah but still, her nitpicking is...”

[Like I said, that’s——]

Ms Francesca looked at our exchange with amusement. Back then, she was pretty formal towards even Ermenhilde but she’s gotten pretty relaxed around her nowadays. She’s gotten used to it, I guess you could say that. That’s why she said that, I think.

A talking weapon.

True, that might sound like something you’d really want. It’s pretty chuuni, I guess.

I recall both Souichi and Koutarou were really excited about Eru at first. Ms Francesca might have a different reason though.

“But Ermenhilde is my partner. That alone, I won’t give to even you, Ms Francesca.”(renji)

[Of course. I am only Renji’s—.]

“—Partner.”

[—Weapon.]

Our usual dialogue. I can’t even count how many times we’ve had this same conversation— —we’re both stubborn like children. On this topic alone, we won’t give in to each other no matter what.

I want Ermenhilde as my partner and she wants me to treat her as a weapon.

But, this is just fine.

Because we’re like this, we have fun together. Even though we want such completely polar opposite things, I trust ermenhilde from the bottom of my heart. And she trusts me back as well.

“fufufu.”

Seeing our exchange, that she must have seen many times already in the past few months, Ms Francesca simply laughed.

“Renji-sama.”

“hm?”

“I hope we can fight in the 2nd round.”

“Eh?”

[Hm?]

When she said that, both me and Ermenhilde made a stupid sound. Even Ms Francescsa herself looked at us surprised at that.

“Is my 2nd matchup against Ms Francesca!?!”(renji)

“Why are you so surprised at that!?”(fran)

[Why are both of you so surprised? That said, I am a bit surprised as well.]

“No, who cares whether you are surprised or not?”(renji)

[Muu.]

But really, I tilted my head in confusion. What the hell was Utano-san thinking when making the tournament table?

Beside me, Ms Francesca was making a sad face.

“Only a little more is fine but, it’d be great if you could notice me a bit more.”(fran)

[Seriously. I’m sorry that he lacks such resourcefulness.]

“Why the hell are you apologising?”(renji)

I’ll cry, goddamnit.

Ahh.....Really, I have not been seeing anything around me.

I just think about myself and am truly become indifferent towards others. Even though I myself am completely dependent on others. I had not realized it at all.

O’Brien-san, Masaki-chan. I was worried about those two and didn’t think about anything else. How narrow-sighted of me. Really, the world I look at is really small.

“What happened, Renji-sama?”

Getting worried about me who was drooping his shoulders, Ms Francesca asked me so.

Her voice was brimming with kindness.



“Nah. It’d be great if both of us could win through to the 2nd round.”(renji)

“Yes!”

I’m pretty sure she knows who my opponent is. That’s why, she must have been worried.

So that she could fight me in the second round. AS a student as an adventurer.

I’m pretty sure that after she graduates from the academy, Ms Francesca will have to quit being an adventurer. As a beautiful and skilled noble, there was no reason to live as something risky like an adventurer.

That’s why, at this last stage, at least—she wants to fight against her comrade with whom she has been travelling for so long. I’m sure that after that, she’d be able to part ways with a smile. The life of an adventurer is a constant cycle of meetings, farewells and reunions. Feeling a bit sad, we both went silent.

As if they had been waiting for it, my name was announced.

“Ah.”

The voice that came from beside me was filled with anxiousness.

“I’ll be waiting for you, in the second round.”(renji)

That's why, I said that.

But still, the anxiety and concern in her eyes didn't disappear.

So I brought out Ermenhilde from my pocket and handed it over to her.

"Keep it. As a good luck charm. It's an item blessed by the gods themselves."(renji)

"Is it okay?"

[Yeah. Will you be fine alone?]

"I'm not a kid anymore."(renji)

As usual, you talk like a mother in the weirdest of places.

"It's a substitute for the ribbon. After the tournament ends, I'll give you a proper gift as well."(renji)

"Eh....."

"it's a promise."

Aah, I muttered in my head.

I ended up saying that. I ended up promising again.

Promises are heavy. It's to say them but difficult to fulfil. If you are unable to fulfil them, you betray not just the person you promised but yourself as well. Both end up hurt.

Even though I'm supposed to know that already, still I— made a promise.

Being led to the entrance, I thought.

“Haah.”

I got another reason to not lose.

The sword on my waist felt so fragile that I couldn't calm down.

At times like these, normally, Ermenhilde would make some light talk and calm me but she wasn't here either.

Haah—

Seriously, how lonely.

## Chapter 53: Sword and Sword (3)

While ascertaining that my sword was on my waist, as I climbed up into the arena, an extremely loud cheer that could explode one's eardrums rose.

Realizing that at least half of those cheers were for me, I almost felt my body freeze from fear and nervousness. Really, I'm not used to being in front of so many people.

At times like these, I'd talk to Ermenhilde or my comrades to avert my thoughts but.....right now, I was alone.

Aah, I really am so helpless when alone.

While I gave bitter smile realizing that, from my opposite side—O'brien-san entered the stage.

With grizzled blonde hair and a well maintained beard.

Even though he is well past the age of being in active duty, he is a great man that still stands at the very forefront of the army while swinging his sword.

His body was covered in the full plate iron armour used by the Knight Order. Normally it's what lower level knights wear but its perfect for use in such a tournament.

As expected, if he were to wear his full mithril armour here, it'd be really unfair.

In his hands was a two-hand sword which was longer and heavier than the one on my waist. Unlike me and Masaki-chan who focus on fast slashes, his sword style focuses on smashing and hacking down the enemy.

Once more, loud cheers rose.

But somehow, the cheers felt slightly lesser than mine. Must be my imagination.

It seems O'brien-san himself realized that as he was giving a rare wry smile.

Judging by his eyes and expression, he seems to be in a pretty good mood. When he's pissed, just standing in front of him, his stare alone would make it feel like your life span is getting shortened.

.....it's the kind of fear only people who have witnessed it can understand.

"It seems you're the more popular one."(ob)

"I doubt that. If they knew how I really was, it'll probably disappear completely."

"I won't be too sure of that."

Inside my head, the magic [voice] resounded.

It's gave an introduction for me and O'brien-san as normally done in such tournaments.

In fact, like right now— —this isn't the first time I'm standing in such an arena. It's a great place to win money and also a really good opportunity to test your own skill as well after all.

To see how strong you are, to test how much you can fight alone.

For me, who was the weakest of the 13, a place like this Coliseum where you fight with blunt swords was a pretty convenient place.

At times, I was made to fight against monsters acquired by slave merchants as well though.

"Back then, you did train here quite a lot, eh?"(ob)

"It feels really nostalgic. To think, 3 years have already passed from that time."

I wonder, how long did we actually stay in the Imnesia continent.....I think it was less than even a year.

After getting used to fighting in this continent, getting used to killing monsters, we accustomed ourselves to fight with swords and magic.

After that, we went to Elfheim continent where we had to fight actually strong monsters and demon—and finally, we went to Abenelm where we had to face off against whole armies of monsters and Demons, and then finally fought the Demon Lord and then the Demon God.

Recalling those times, I realized how peaceful Imnesia continent already was in comparison. Though the threat of monsters was there, they still had the composure of capturing those monsters to make them fight in the Coliseum in the end.

Well, it's not like I, who had to fight desperately even against such weak monsters, have any right to complain though.

“You were always so close to crying.”(ob)

“I didn't, in the end though.....”

This Knight commander who knew a lot of my embarrassing past spoke of such things with a broad grin and laughed.

He must be really laughing recalling all sorts of things inside his mind.

Not all, but I could remember a lot of them as well so all I could do was just scratch my cheek and give a wry smile.

Once I got used to fighting with comrades, the next was to learn how to fight one-on-one, then against many while alone; all this was drilled into me here in this arena in the name of training. It's still actually kind of a slight trauma for me.

I recall when I was told to fight against many goblins inside this arena with nothing more than this blunt weak-looking sword. I was sure I'd die that day.

It's said that the arena is a place to test your skill and guts, but I really wish they'd not put my life on the line as well. There's a limit to how spartan you can be.

.....thanks to that, I was able to survive till now though and have been able to travel even alone. But still, recalling those memories still make me hope that he could have been a bit more gentle with me.

Seriously, I really did come close to crying so many times.

"Well, an adult can't cry in front of kids after all, right?"(renji)

"Ha——certainly, that's true."(ob)

When I said that, O'brien-san gave a broad smile.

In my opinion, adults have to look good when in front of kids no matter what. Even if you are unsightly, and completely not cool, I really don't want to think of myself as being not cool. I don't want the kids to see me like that.

An adult is a person who's made out of stupid pride alone. And for that pride alone, he must work as hard as possible and can become as strong as he can. At least, that's what adults are in my opinion.



“So, have you gotten any stronger from then?”(ob)

“I wonder.”

The magic [voice] continued to speak inside my head.

After finishing my and O’Brien-san’s introduction, it was speaking about our journey—about the monsters we fought, *etc.*

Hearing myself being introduced like some cool, super powerful warrior, I only felt embarrassed and felt like getting out of here as fast as I could.

Yesterday, I was laughing when hearing Souichi, Masaki-chan and Aya’s intros but right now, when I was the one being talked about, I couldn’t laugh at all.

The only one laughing was the knight who held the same merits and result as the ones being told except for a few.

While lightly talking with O’Brien-san, I drew my sword. And O’Brien, who had already unsheathed his sword, put it up on his shoulders as usual.

“Show me, how much you’ve grown.”(ob)

“I’ll be in your care.”(renji)

I doubt the spectators can hear our talk.

That's why we can talk like that.

What I'm wished to be, is a Hero.

A Hero known as Yamada Renji.

The hope of humanity, the existence that reaches a helping hand out to those in pain, never losing.....an undefeatable hero.

But still, since I'm standing here——I have to answer to those, almost selfish, expectations.

That's the kind of existence a Hero is.

I wonder if I'm the only one who thinks like that.

.....even though to always win is an almost impossible task for me.

Well, I think that you'd say that I shouldn't stand here if I truly feel that way though.

In the end, even while using my debt to Utano-san as an excuse——like this, I might be influencing someone right now.

It's annoying to have so many expectations of me but still, I am.....just like before, someone who gets lonely easily.

Holding the sword in my right hand, I relaxed my body.

I took no stance. In the first place, this knight in front of me never taught me any specific style of fighting.

There was form or type to the way I fight. I have not learned Battoujutsu like Masaki-chan or the sword forms the Knight Order teaches either.

My way of fighting was the way to survive, the way to kill monsters.

That's all this knight taught me.

"Fuu."

"—You don't seem very nervous now."(ob)

"If I was, I'd die in the very first second after all."

"fuh.....I guess I don't have to hold back then."

No, if you can please hold back against me.

If he did what he said, even in front of so many people, he really wouldn't care a bit as he smashes me all over the place. Giving a bitter smile, I took a deep breath once more.

I said that but, I still am a bit nervous. I feel like the strength I was putting in

my grip was stronger than even when I'm facing monsters.

I'm well aware of O'brien-san's strength. He has the destructive strength in a single swing of his large sword to completely destroy the floor I was standing on. Even if his sword is a blunt one, that won't change.

I'm sure, if his opponent was anyone other than me, he'd hold back his full strength.

But against me, he'd go all out.

That's the kind of man he is. I am well aware of that.

That's why, I want to answer him back properly. Fighting at full strength—I want to win. Unrelated to me being a Hero and whatnot, I just want to win against O'brien-san.

This past one year, I spent it freely. Averting my gaze that was still in chaos after the war with demons and the Demon God, I went away on my travels.

While I spending time like that, O'brien-san was working hard and doing his best to bring stability to the country and to end the chaos.

That's why, at least here, I want to fight him with my full strength. I'm sure that's just my own selfish excuse though.

——Inside my head, the magic [voice] finally stopped.



“OOHH!!”

The next instant, even though he was wearing that heavy armour, O'brien-san closed in on me with just a few steps.

His force was incredible and my body almost went stiff from the pressure.

He swung his sword at me with unimaginable destructive force behind it. It would be impossible for me to take that on with the sword I was holding.

Without reacting to his yell, I kept my calm and dodged the swing by bending back my body.

The pressure from the sword made my clothes sway as the sword crashed into the stone floor. Without even looking at that, I swung my sword.

I aimed for his neck.

But he blocked that instantly with the gauntlet on his left hand that had let go of his sword. A loud metallic clang resounded in my ears.

Even though my strikes aren't that powerful as his, though it wouldn't wound him, it should still have numbed his hand. Yet, without showing any change in expression, he used his right hand to swing back his large sword.

I stopped the swing with my foot and used that momentum to jump away to create some distance between us.

In this world, most swords are mass produced ones.

Since they are produced like that, most don't have much sharpness. If it was some mithril sword made solely for one user, it would take various things into consideration like more sharpness and habits of the wielder but swords like these, that are given in the Coliseum, are not like that. Above all, for the tournament they were blunted as well. So it was possible for me to block it with just my boot. It's a technique you shouldn't use in an actual battle even by mistake.

"Houu, you're like an acrobat."(ob)

"I'm not that good."

Lowering my waist, I held my longsword with both hands.

Every weapon has its own advantage. While recalling the teachings of O'brien-san, I took another deep breath.

Advantages of a long sword, advantages of a large two hand sword. At the same time, all had their own weaknesses as well.

All of that was thoroughly trained into me. You could say that it had been carved into my body even. Told through words then explained through my body. I was trained till it felt like I didn't have any arms.

How nostalgic, really.

"Well, well, what are you going to do next?"(ob)

“let’s see...”

Even when I aimed for his neck, it was easily deflected.

It clearly showed that there was a reason this man was still in active duty even at his age. His reflexes were at an astonishing level.

Seeing my own full strength attacks deflected so easily, I became even more cautious.

As if he found it amusing, O’Brien-san once again took his usual stance of having his sword on his shoulder. He’s going to swing with his full strength once more.

This man doesn’t use any tricky moves. At least in one-on-one battles like this.

The advantage of a 2hand sword was the greater range and destructive strength. And it’s weight, that alone was a big weapon in itself.

But——all of those were its weakness as well. It’s bigger range can be turned into a disadvantage if you can step in close to his body.

Because its swings are so destructive, it causes stamina to deplete fast as well.

And as for its weight.....as long as you can avoid the attack, it’ll create a big opening to attack.



Thinking of all that; What should I do next?

Even with all such weaknesses, even after stepping in close to him and dodging his attack, in the end, my attack was blocked.

Just like how I know the weakness and strengths of his large sword, O'briensan knows the same for my longsword as well. And he also knows the way I fight.

Since I lack the arm strength, I can't clash my sword directly with his.

Due to that, my moves are limited. So I aim for the vitals. Neck, joints, heart; I fight with each strike aiming to kill instantly.

That's why, he was able to block it. Because he knew that I would only aim for his neck at that moment.

"Let's go!!"

That said, it's not like I had any other way to fight.

I wasn't giving up, in fact, I felt unusually calm as I concentrated on O'briensan's charge.

We're both aware of each other's moves and skills. Then, it'll be a battle of pure ability and skill.

Until now, I had never been able to win against him because I was nowhere near his level. Whether it be in arm strength, my physique, my techniques, or experience.

He swung his sword again. Against that full powered swing, I could only once again dodge by bending backwards and once more, the floor got smashed.

From there, to create a big distance between us, I jumped away.

“OOH!!!”

Trying to pursue me, his sword swung after me.

The swing was so fast that it looked as if the sword was weightless as it closed in on me.

Jumping back one more step, I somehow dodged that attack as well. The tip of sword slightly brushed my clothes making a small tear in it.

My feet landed on the ground at the same time as the sword swung past me.

Seeing the opening created from the wide swing of the sword, I rushed in towards O’Brien-san with full speed.

But my actions were seen through already as he, while remaining in his stance, used his incredible arm strength to swing back his sword towards me.

Swinging back the sword from such a weird stance should have limited the power behind the horizontal slash——or so I thought.

Feeling a bad premonition, I quickly dropped down my body when the sword rushed just above my head cutting through the air.

Right in front of me was his right leg. His knee aimed for my face. As I bent my neck to dodge it, reflexively I swung my sword towards his left leg.

His right leg rose and his left leg, which I tried slashing, remained uninjured.

While clicking my tongue, I rolled on the stone floor to distance myself away from him. But this time, O'brien-san pursued after me.

Against me, who was still on his knees, he brought down his sword from above.

“Shiit!!!”

I dodged that slash by jumping to the side and then avoided the next one that came after me by bending my neck away.

His sword moved so fast that you wouldn't believe that it was a 2 hand large sword. Unable to even take on that barrage with my sword, I continued to dodge it. I didn't even have time to properly stand up and fix my posture.

He continued to swing, slash, and mow me down with his sword.

And I dodged, twisted my body and moved my neck to avoid all of the attacks. As the speed of the attacks continued to rise, my speed in dodging them also rose.

Let alone blink, I didn't even have the time to breathe.

But his speed only kept on rising further.

It was Boost magic that enhanced physical abilities.

Something I cannot use. Even though it's a power that almost most of the people in this world possess. Magical energy.

I could faintly see the earthen coloured magical energy around O'brien-san.

I don't consider it to be cheating though. This was normal way to fight for the people of this world. I, the one who didn't have it, was the weird one.

The speed of his sword, sharpness, all rose.

But still, I continued to desperately dodge.

The ones I couldn't avoid, I parried them somehow by smacking my sword at the base of his large sword.

He accelerated. More and more.

The fatigue in my arms continued to grow and my arm started to go numb. The lack of oxygen made it painful and my unblinking eyes hurt. But still, he continued to accelerate. Even though he's already stronger than me, by using magic to enhance his movements, even while wearing the armour, he was faster than me. Each and every one of his attacks coming from his enhanced arm strength made my arms grow numb.

And I continued to parry those attacks with minimum required movements.

Silence. As if even the grunts and shouts while fighting were useless, both me and O'brien-san were completely silent.

Only the sharp sound of sword clashing came to my ears.

The [voice] of magic that normally commentated on the matches was also not resounding in my ears anymore.

I want to breathe.

I dodged the diagonal slash by lowering my waist

I want to breathe.

As if he knew I was going to dodge, he stopped his swing and returned back the sword aiming for me neck.

I want to breathe.

That attack, rather than using my sword to strike back at it, his hand holding the large sword——I used my left fist to strike at his wrist to stop the attack. No matter how much arm strength he might have, it's still flesh and skin, and bones underneath that. It's much better than getting slashed by the sword.

In that instant, a single opening appeared.

Rather than taking this chance to breathe, I used my sword and aimed for his knee joint that is not protected by his full plate armour. I didn't even have to look at it, I simply aimed for the joint solely through my trained instinct.

Let alone being blunt, the sword that had taken heavy damage from the swings of his large sword and was almost in tatters, was unable to cut through and simply ended up as striking him but still, that made O'brien-san bend his knee.

From there, I hastened my side, swung back my arm and with the minimum required movements, I stuck my long sword at his neck.

There, finally, I took a deep breath.

.....it's a miracle that I didn't actually slash away his neck by going with the momentum. Or were they sure that if it was me I would stop myself in time?

Huge cheers rose, like thunder. It was really a huge cheer of joy.

"You've become better."(ob)

“Where, exactly?”

My heart was beating so fast that it felt like it'd explode.

Sweat poured down from all over my body and both my arms felt like they were going numb.

The sword I had was in such a bad condition that no amount of repairs could save it. That's how ruined it was.

Though I'm not injured anywhere, it still feels like my whole body hurts.

In comparison, O'brien-san was simply breathing slightly roughly.

Just looking at us, it should be clear who was in better condition.

Yet, the [voice] declared me as the winner.

“Tchh. You really should go easy a little.....”

When I said that, O'brien-san went down on his knees.

At the same time, three men in priest-like robes came out from one of the entrances to the arena towards O'brien-san.

“It's not broken. Only wounded.”(ob)

He tried to stand up while saying that but went back down on his knees again.

It was the knee I struck at just now.

It looks like I hit it perfectly and ended up hurting his joint.

Though this was a duel, I still felt a bit bad.

Well, in my case, if I had failed at dodging even once, my head, or rather, my whole body would have been in pieces though.

“Are you okay?”

“Obviously. Seriously.....just because I got slightly injured, you’re already like this.”(ob)

“Well, I can’t help that.”

Saying that, I lent my shoulder to give him support to walk. His full armour really was heavy.

“C’mon, let’s go to the sickbay.”(renji)

“.....To think that I have to borrow the shoulder of a man I once trained myself.”(ob)



“That’s my line. To think that I’d have to lend my shoulder to someone who trained me so hard that I almost vomited all I ate everyday.”

“That was because you were weak.”

“Yeah, sure.”

That’s why.

“Thank you, for training me so well.”(renji)

“Idiot.”

When I said that, he turned his face away with a surprised voice. I felt nice seeing O’Brien-san get embarrassed for once.

Somehow, I didn’t feel weird while thanking him at all.

Though he was a total spartan with me, he still always thought of me and it’s thanks to him I’m even alive right now.

Though they are unpleasant memories, they are not bad. I’m really grateful enough of him that I can still thank him like this.

The white robed priests followed after us as the audience gave a huge round of applause.

I wonder what they thought of our fight.

Well, for the time being I think they were satisfied, I think.

Feirona and the others might be in the stands as well so it might be a good idea to ask them.

“Don’t blame Yuuko-dono too much, okay?”(ob)

“Huh?”

After walking a bit, he suddenly said that.

Why did Utano-san come up here? I was thinking in confusion when O’Brien-san continued.

I, do not what happened that made you always have such a gloomy face.”(ob)

“Do, I really have been like that?”

“I have said this before as well but you’re the type whose emotions are completely visible on your face.”

“And here I was sure that I had matured a bit after all this time.”

Well, that doesn’t mean I’d get good at making poker faces though. But still, it’s a bit eye opening to be told that directly to your face.

Was I really making that gloomy of a face always? I thought I was pretty normal as always.

But if he says that, it must be true. All said and done, this man has clashed swords with me the most after all.

He must be able to understand me pretty well now.....I think.

“Because you were so gloomy, she came up with something like that debt or whatnot.”(ob)

“I don’t really understand the connection between my debt and my gloomy face.....”

“It’s to make you feel willing and eager again by bringing you out in front of everyone, is what I’m saying.”

‘You should understand at least that much!’ it feels like he’s saying that.

But, well, yeah..

.....just how much am I making other around me worry for me?

Just how hard do I have to work to be able to answer their concerns?

Utano-san, Aya, and everyone else as well. Even Koutarou and Astraera.....

“What’s wrong?”(ob)

“No, it’s nothing.”

When I said that, O’Brien-san’s shoulders shook with laughter.

It’s a bit troublesome to walk since I’m lending him my shoulder but still, I felt happy to see him laugh like that.

“I guess, women who pull you around really do suit you.”(ob)

“What?”

“I have been thinking of this from back then as well but it seems you are only able to move forward when someone shows you the path and pulls you towards it.”

Being told that, I had no words to say back.

That’s because I knew deep inside that it was true.

In the past one year, I travelled to fulfil my promise to Eru but was I truly moving like when I was travelling with my comrades.....It’s hard to say.

.....I felt pathetic to not even being able to refute O’Brien-san’s words.

“That’s how it is.”(ob)

“What do you even.....”

Could you not reveal it all so easily.

Did my reaction seem funny to him, as he laughed again. This time, out loud.

“Later, be kind with Yuuko-dono alright?”(ob)

“What kind of encouragement is that?”

“Fufu.”

Haah, I sighed.

Raising my head, in the balcony of the noble seats,——Utano-san, Aya and Yui-chan along with Anastasia on her shoulder were there.

Probably, behind them Toudou, Kuuki and KNIGHT are also there. Can’t say for sure about Kudou.

And they were all looking at me.

“Don’t tell this to Yuuko-dono okay?”(ob)

“I won’t.”

“She is really scary when she gets angry after all.”

“I know.”

Or rather, I definitely won’t say that.

We were talking about this during our duel.....if I said that to that shy Sage-sama, what would she do to me just to hide her embarrassment? Well, that might be interesting to see on its own though.

“It seems Aya has grown to be pretty beautiful as well. Great people do have great taste indeed. How splendid.”(ob) (T/N: to be exact what Obrien said was -‘Great men have great fondness for sensual pleasure’ but that kind of sounded a bit too weird so I ‘localised’ it the best I could.)

“What kind of weird things are you saying?”(renji)

True, that sounds great. As a man, they are truly words one would be attracted to.

But still.

.....So O’Brien-san had (such desires) this kind of side to him as well.

Somehow, it felt really fresh.

## Chapter 54: Sword and Sword (4)

From the small palm holding my right hand, I felt warmth coming to me.

At the same time, the source of that warmth, light, also came out of that small palm.

A miracle of the Goddess. It is used by the followers of Goddess Astraera, a small miracle of sorts. It heals wounds, cures diseases, truly an act of god.

If your belief was weak and your class weak, the effects would be lesser as well but the girl holding my hand was—Amagi Yayoi, a user of true miracles.

Possessing healing spells that seemed more like reversing time itself, she has saved us countless times.

Together with yayoi-chan, just like if we were in an infirmary, both us were currently behind a white curtain along with other priests.

Since there were women among the contestants as well, it's a very obvious thing to do. Thanks to that, I was able to talk to Yayoi-chan at ease.

“As expected, it's great that yayoi-chan's here.”(renji)

“uu.....I'm happy that you say that but still...”

She had a somewhat unsatisfied expression on her face. Probably because she

was here, in the sickbay of the Coliseum.

That said, it's not like this place had any special facilities like an actual infirmary or clinic though. It was just a room with numerous beds with pure white sheets spread on them and some wooden chair sets like the ones we were currently sitting on.

And sitting on all of those chairs were other priests who were healing the contestants of the tournament.

It seems yayoi-chan was especially popular as the line after me was incredible.

.....There were even some who were clearly not participants but they must be people who just want to have a chance to look at Yayoi-chan.

Right now, she had tied back her usually loose long black hair behind her neck and was also not in her uniform or civilian clothes but was wearing a pure white robe with golden embroidery. It resembled the robes worn by other worshippers of Goddess Astraera but it had more exquisite details.

Possessing the ability to directly perform the miracles of the goddess, yayoi-chan held a very high position among the priests. Or rather, she had been officially declared as [Saint] (holy woman).

As people summoned by the Goddess herself, we 13 are already considered as higher beings by the humans who worship the Goddess And even among us, Yayoi-chan who could heal all wounds, cure any disease was looked at as if she was a goddess herself.



At some point, she began to be referred to as the [Saint], in time she learnt to act and work as truly a [Saint] and by the time the journey ended, she had saved countless people.

From our point of view who knew only how to fight, what she did was truly admirable as well but for Yayoi-chan herself, there's only one man whose wounds she wants to keep on always healing.

Her emotions showed clearly on her face and someone in front of her right now, I could only give a wry smile.

"I wanted to wear a pretty dress too....."(Yayoi)

"You can wear one as much as you want after the tournament is over."

".....I wanted to wear a pretty dress and cheer for Onii-chan."

She actually corrected her statement, this brocon.

Yayoi-chan likes Souichi. As an outsider, I couldn't tell whether it was as siblings or as a man.

There are times when I felt that she took it very far, yet at the same time there were moments where she maintains her distance like normal siblings as well.

There are times when she'd get so close to him that even Souichi will be

bewildered yet she'd claim that it's only because they're brother and sister. It seems that side of her has become a bit more prominent after coming to this world and she has been often told about this by Souichi himself and Aya, who is her best friend.

Utano-san has also been quite attentive about it but even after this one year, there's no change in her.

"A dress, eh?"(renji)

"Muu, Renji oniisan?"

"Nah, I was just wondering if Souichi even has the composure to be looking at dresses right now."

"Muu.."

When I said that, she puffed her cheeks in dissatisfaction. I guess she'd still want to show her dressed up appearance to the person she likes. Yayoi-chan was much more mature than others her age but only in this respect, she was still very girlish.

But in truth, when Souichi concentrates on something there are times when he loses sight of everything else literally. It's especially surprising to see the level of his concentration in tournaments like this where you have to fight in front of so many people.

I'm sure right now, his head is only filled with how he'd fight me or Masaki-chan.

I have sparred with him as training during our journey a few times but we have rarely fought properly. Especially me and Souichi, we have fought only once like that.

That's why, i have no doubt that he's definitely thinking about ways to fight me or Masaki-chan right now.

And because she knew his personality as well, yayoi-chan gave a deep, deep sigh. A [Saint] shouldn't be making such a face, really.

"But still, I'm sure such dresses would suit Yayoi-chan as well." (renji)

" 'as well'? what do you mean by that?"

"Ouch, ow!"

Could you not grip my hand so tightly?

Unlike her, I didn't have any divine protection from Astraera so I am weaker than this girl in front of me even in terms of simple grip strength. Really, it's such a sob story.

"Smile, smile!"(renji)

"There's only one person worthy of my smile."

“.....”

As if she was sulking, the [Saint]-sama said that without blushing even a bit. Looking at her pointed lips ( ^ this shape), I could only give a wry smile forgetting my strongly gripped hand.

Seriously. At least try to hide your true feelings a bit, will you?

But still, I myself am never able to tell her that directly. How should I treat her feelings? I have thought about it many times but in the end, I have not yet reached an answer.

This was a problem both Souichi and Yayoi-chan, only the [family] members could resolve by themselves. An outsider like me has no say I think. Was I just running or was this my trust in them.....Can't really call this as trust, now can I?

“What’s wrong?”(yayoi)

“Nothing. Just thinking about how both you and Souichi are on really good terms.”

“fufu, of course.”

Saying that, she puffed her chest proudly. She really is so happy that even I felt happy looking at her. I felt more energy fill in the palm healing my arm.

Even though we’re ten years apart in age, I still felt slightly embarrassed feeling her soft small hands. It made me realize how hard and stiff my hands

were by swinging the sword all the time.

“How envious.”(renji)

“Really?”

“yeah.”

I didn't have any siblings. I was a single child.

That's why, maybe I consider Souichi, Yayoi-chan and others as adorable.

Hearing me, Yayoi-chan gave a laugh. It must be imagination that her smile seemed to be full of mischief as well.

“Renji-oniisan as well, aren't you on very good terms with Aya-chan as well?”(yayoi)

“I wonder.”

When I turned my gaze trying to run away from her, she gave a smile.

“Saying that again.....mouu.”(yayoi)

“I can't help it. We're ten years apart in age.”

“I don’t think it really matters though.”

“I feel it does though.”

Was I too old fashioned to think that an age gap of 10 years was too big?

It doesn’t seem like a problem in this world though.

After all, O’Brien-san’s wife was still in her twenties making the age gap between them almost 20 years. Thinking like that, I guess 10 year gap really isn’t much.

While sighing at Yayoi-chan who was laughing, I shook my head.

“This isn’t something to talk about here, is it?”(renji)

“But I’m bored.”

“I’m sure you have a lot to do, don’t you?”

At least for today, she should be busy for the whole day.

The injured won’t end, and there should be many men who’d come just to get a chance to see Yayoi-chan as well.

“I know that healing the injured is important but still I want to talk like this once in a while as well.”(yayoi)

Well, I can't deny her that. She doesn't have a personality that she would start chatting with any random person easily. There might be people who might be trying to listen to our chat behind the curtain as well but for now, I didn't sense any.

"So?"

"I'm lonely ~"(yayoi)

Wow, it's amazing she can say that. I looked at her with a fed up gaze. You literally have one person who can rid you of loneliness. At least I'm sure that it's not meant towards me. Depending on who the person is, that line would make the perfect line to seduce someone.

That said, I'm the same in wanting to talk to her though.

After all, even though we were both here in the capital, I didn't have the chance to properly talk to her even once.

Especially since the tournament started everyone was really busy, so all the more so.

"Even if you say that..."(renji)

Unfortunately, I didn't have any topic that could amuse Yayoi-chan. And most probably, the only thing she'd want to hear from me is about me and Aya, I'm sure.

I think at her age, they really like that kind of talk. But unfortunately, I have nothing worth talking about it. I haven't even talked to Aya much these days. In fact, she should be more aware of Aya right now.

"Well, I heard that you were carried to the capital very injured or something?"(yayoi)

"Ah?"

That's quite the old story now.

I recalled the [Forest of Rotting Souls] and that shitty Skeleton monster.

"Ahh, I really came close to dying that time....."

I leaked a really heavy sigh. Honestly speaking, it really wouldn't have been weird if I really had died that day against that kind of an opponent. But that's not what yayoi-chan what's to hear about I think. Her eyes were full of curiosity.

"At that time, something happened right?"(yayoi)

".....something?"

I tried thinking.

"About how Yui-chan saved me?"(renji)



“No, after that! Mou..”

Why is she talking like those old aunties you meet while walking down the road? I don't know what she'd do to me if I said that to her but it probably won't be pretty for me, I'm sure.

I thought of talking like she did by hiding her mouth with her hand, so I tried to pull out my right hand from her grip but, failed.

.....as usual, she's stronger than me in pure physical strength. Goddamnit! As if implying that she won't let me run away, her grip even became tighter. I didn't feel pain, probably because she was still healing me as well. If you're done healing could you please let go of my hand already?

“Didn't Aya-chan stay by your side and nursed you all the time till you woke up?”(yayoi)

“You sure know a lot.”

Or rather, she was sleeping flat on the table of my room though. Recalling that, I felt myself smile, or rather, it was a difficult to describe feeling.

“It's known to everyone you know? This world doesn't have much ways for amusement after all.”(yayoi)

“I'll be quite troubled if now we start to be used for amusement as well though.”

“Tell that to Aya-chan. She was the one who stayed overnight in your room.”

“.....”

I didn't really pay it much attention before but I guess it's like that? Hearing her say that, I guess it's not strange for it to become a gossip topic. In fact it's amazing I didn't hear about it till now.

I'm sure the origin of the rumours are the maids of the castle. They should be the most knowledgeable in such gossips seeing they are in great number and are of the same gender as well.

Uumu. I can't really silence them now but for it to become a strange widespread rumour is.....uumu.

“Renji-oniisan, if you don't treat Aya-chan more kindly, you'll incur divine punishment you know?”(yayoi)

“...nmuu.”

“Well, it was nice of you to invite her to dinner a while ago though.”

“I see.”

“But still, wouldn't it have been fine if you took her back to her room as well after that?”

“.....yayoi-chan, you’re supposed to be younger than Aya right?”

“Yes, obviously.”

Is it okay for her to tell a man to take her best friend back to his room so easily like that? That too, at night. I’m pretty sure she knew what she was implying as well which made it even more difficult for me to say anything else.

Are my sense for such things really that bad?

While feeling a bit scared of this girl in front of me, I turned my gaze away, from this whole topic if possible.

“Renji-oniisan, you need to be more aggressive.”

“Yes.”

“Aya-chan, she was satisfied with just getting invited to dinner you know? As her childhood friend, and best friend, it’s really pathetic.”

“I see.”

It seems she really is dissatisfied with our current relationship.

That Aya, what did she tell to Yayoi-chan? While thinking of that, I shook my head. It’s better not to think much about it, I think.

“If it goes on like this, you’ll forever be dominated by Yuuko-san, you know?”(yayoi)

“.....”

What is this? Did I ever do something bad to Yayoi-chan?

I thought a lot but I couldn’t come up with anything. If I had to say, Yayoi-chan is basically implying that my relationship with Aya is too vague. Am I treating Aya as a proper woman, or am I looking at her as a sister or a daughter. Does Aya want to me as a man or does she want to me as family or a good friend.

I guess as her best friend, she really must be worried about our such a vague relationship.

“With that said, “(Yayoi)

“Hm?”

Suddenly, she gave a smile.

I instantly went on guard, probably because this body fully knows the fearsomeness of the creatures called women, I think.

“After the tournament is over, be sure to properly patch thing up okay?”(yayoi)

“ugh.....well, haah.”

I don't even want to think what she wants me to do exactly so I just gave a vague response.

Maybe she didn't like my answer much, I felt strength gather in her grip holding my hand once more. With *bikuri* my shoulder shivered due to slight pain.

“There, I'm done.”(yayoi)

“Aah, thanks, Yayoi-chan.”

All said and doen, she did properly heal my arm and hand that was hurt by O'brien-san's sword so she probably isn't really that angry at me, I think.

Rather than saying she was angry, it's more like she was simply trying to instigate my indecisive personality though.

What is this, really. Rather than me, Yayoi-chan seems more mature and adult-like. How sad, or should I say pathetic.....or should I be happy to see her grow like this?

“What's wrong? Why are you staring at my face?”(yayoi)

“Nah, I'll come back again after the second round.”

“Please fight without getting injured. Seriously”

“That’s a bit too difficult for me, but I’ll try.”

Saying that, I opened the white curtain. When, my eyes met with the few people standing after me in line. Only a few were injured ones and most were fanboys here just to look at Yayoi-chan.

“C’mon, move move. The injured ones come first.”(renji)

While making them scatter, I guided the next injured contestant first inside the curtain.

“Well then, good luck. Be sure to win, Renji-oniisan.”

Just before I closed the curtain, saying that Yayoi-chan gave a small wave towards me.

It felt a bit ticklish, seriously.

Since Yayoi-chan was hidden behind the curtain, the surrounding gazes all gathered at me but ignoring them all, I exited the sickbay.

Some time had passed since my battle with O’Brien-san so Ms Francesca’s should already be over.

I wonder if she won.

While I was thinking of that, a familiar figure entered my vision.

“Kudou.”(renji)

“Ara, you’re finally out.”

While sighing, Kudou was in dress, different than the one yesterday.

Since everyone else around were dressed in armour, she stood out even more.

Though she didn’t seem to mind it at all and was the same as always—with a tired expression on her face. If only she could smile along with those looks, she’d give off such a good impression to others. Well, that’s what makes her Kudou though.

“What happened, why are you here?”(renji)

“Well, it might be interesting so I thought I should inform you.”

“Hm?”

“Yamada-san, your disciple lost you know?”

My disciple, means Ms Francesca.

“I see.”(renji)

“Ara, you’re not surprised?”

I don’t know why Kudou came to tell me about her loss but I felt like her tone was slightly mixed with an intention to tease as well.

Even though Ms Francesca lost, all she cares about is teasing me I guess.

Sighing while looking at her, I thought of what to do.

Should I look for Ms Francesca, or should I let her be alone for a while? Unfortunately, I am a famous so if I were to go and talk to my ‘disciple’ it’ll gather a lot of attention so it’s kind of a pain.

It’s amazing how Kudou doesn’t care at all about any of that. Is her heart made of Mithril or steel or something?

“Nah, I’m a bit surprised.”

“Really?”

When I said that, she grinned as she looked at me.

Her expression changed from a tied one to a her teasing one. She looks like a cat, almost.



“What?”

“fufu, as usual, it shows on your face, Yamada-san.”

“As usual, you really love teasing don’t you, Kudou.”

While scratching the back of my head, I looked upwards to avoid her gaze.

It seems our conversation attracted attention as a lot of nearby contestants were looking at us. Even though the 2nd round hasn’t even started, that’s quite the number that has gathered already.

“that aside, is it fine for you to not show up at your spectator seat?”(renji)

“Don’t wanna. It’s a pain.”

“.....you’re really honest, aren’t you?”

At least be a bit considerate towards Utano-san.

Being told that with such a bothered looking face, I ended up feeling amazed her honesty instead.

“Thanks.”(kudou)

“That wasn’t a compliment.”

“Oh, I see.”

Don’t laugh so delightfully. Can’t really blame her though.

“That aside, your disciple, aren’t you going to look for her?”(kudou)

“Ahn?”

“She seemed pretty depressed, you know?”

“Did you see her ?”

“I don’t know where she is right now but she seemed to be in quite the daze even in the arena ring.”

Well, looks like she took it pretty hard then.

I recalled that red-haired mercenary.

In terms of ability, experience and physique,..... he surpasses Ms Francesca in every way.

Honestly speaking, the chance for Ms Francesca to win was very low from the very start. Against students of her own age, she had the advantage of having more experience but against a professional—an adventurer, her skills were still

far lower as compared to someone who does it for a living.

But still, before the match, .....our conversation. Umu, a little strength gathered in my arm scratching my head.

“Did you come here just to tell me that?”

“Yuuko and Aya sure are so serious always.”(kudou)

Again, she changed the topic so suddenly.

Seeing her usual habit that would normally confuse anyone who wasn't used to it, I leaked out a sigh.

And without even minding my sigh, Kudou continued talking. If it wasn't for her personality, she really would have easily had a few boyfriends already.

Even though she's got such a good face, what a waste. Well, I wish she'd stop bothering me as well though.

Even though she'd do nothing and have a tired face always, only at times like these, when teasing someone, her nasty side comes out and she becomes energetic.

“They should live more the way they want.”(kudou)

“Well, everyone has their own social tendencies okay?”

And they also have various bonds and obligations.

Utano-san is working hard to reorganise the country, Aya is making effort to learn how to properly control her own immense power.

Toudou, Kuuki, Yui-chan.....i'm sure everyone else as well, are working hard in their own way.

Thinking of that, I looked towards Kudou.

“The only ones playing around are just you and me.”(renji)

“How rude. Even like this, I am working hard to spread more ways of amusement throughout the world you know?”

“I'm sure at least 50% of your motive is just money though, isn't it?”

“About 70% to be exact.”

“That doesn't make it better.”

It's not something to say so proudly. Seeing her say that so proudly, I felt like lightly hitting her head like back then, but I restrained myself.

My gaze turned towards her long hair——beautifully combed silky hair.

She is, in the end, a woman after all.

Well, she'd probably dodge it easily even if I tried. Maybe she'd even hit back playfully as usual. In any case, I don't want to disturb her well combed hair, a rare thing to happen, right now.

Kudou's personality is like that but her hair have done no sin.

"Oh?"

"What?"

"I was sure you'd hit me."

And , she made the action of defending her head with her hands.

She really goes at her own pace. Because I knew how much she didn't care about surroundings, her actions looked really childish.

"You won't?"(kudou)

"Don't wanna."

"Tche."

Are you really a kid?

I feel like sighing, seriously.

“I really like Yamada-san’s tsukkomis though.”

“What kind of compliment even is that?”

Please don’t praise me in ways that make it difficult for me to react.

I’m sure she teases Souichi and others like this as well, as they must be quite troubled with her. Especially Souichi, since he has a lot of women surrounding her after all.

“Go say that to Souichi or something.”(renji)

“These days, Toudou-san has been pretty fun as well though.”

“.....Angela-san, eh?”

“Ah, so you knew!”

Before I knew it, our talk had lost its topic again.

“Did Ms Francesca leave the Coliseum already?”(renji)

“Not yet I think. Maybe she’s at the rear entrance, or maybe the toilet?”

I could only think of those two options as well.

There are quite a lot of people in the Coliseum now that the tournament has started.

If she was looking for a place to be alone, feeling depressed, she'd go to a less populated area. I can't meet her if she's in the toilet but I can if she's at the rear entrance.

"I see. Then I'm off."(renji)

"Ara. Is your disciple more important than chatting with me?"

"She's not really my disciple since I haven't taught her anything much though. Well, but yes, Ms Francesca is more important than you."

"So rude ~"

Saying that, she cackled with laughter.

Since I can joke like this, it's pretty fun to talk with her. I'm sure she enjoys it as well, in her own way.

" 'Ms', eh?"(kudou)

As I began to walk away, she said that.

“What?”(renji)

“Nope, nothing.”

And, she giggled.

Maybe due to the dress, she looked more classy, or rather, she looked good like that.

If it as anyone else, laughing like that would make for a pleasant view but when it’s Kudou, it only makes it look all the more shady.

“Well then, thanks for informing me about it.”(renji)

“You’re welcome.”

And this time, I walked away.

.

.

.

Ms Francesca was at the rear entrance— —that is, the exit made for nobles



or in case of emergencies.

It wasn't any different from the other entrances but it had flowers or pictures painted on it, giving it a more elegant look.

I always seem to forget it but she was also a member of a noble family and it must be no problem for her to be here at all. Did she say that she wanted to be alone or something as even the soldiers had left the place for now.

And even in this empty place, as if to not stand out much, she was sitting at a bench placed in the very corner. She seemed pretty depressed as her trembling shoulders made it seem that she might start crying any moment.

Suddenly, while I was looking at Ms Francesca, my hand was pulled.

"What, so you found her already?" (renji)

"We were waiting."

The one who pulled me was Mururu.

WE haven't had the chance to meet much recently but she didn't seemed to have changed much anyway. Only, on her pure white hair, a golden ribbon was tied around it.

"That ribbon, it suits you."(renji)

“Thanks.....So, about Fran.”(mururu)

“Yeah, I heard.”

She lost her match. But I didn't have to say it out loud.

Even though she was so eager, she lost without winning even a single round in the main tournament. I can understand how painful that could be. After meeting her, I have seen her train hard for this tournament for so long. Even though she came close to getting killed by goblins, her will didn't break.

That's why we could only look at her from far away like this. Mururu must be feeling the same as me. Even though she found Ms Francesca much earlier than me, she still decided to just look at her from far off.

“Where's Feirona?”

“Together with Solnea, watching the tournament.”

“And, you came here to look for her.”

“.....Fran, looked really sad.”

Well, it made even Kudou come to me just to tell me that after all. It really must have shown on her face when she lost.

I guess, even that trouble hating Item Creator must have felt worried in her

own way for her. I still can't understand how her mind works but that's not really important right now.

"Normally, it's best to let them be alone for a while in my opinion but.."(renji)

".....No."

"I know."

Slight anger appeared in Mururu's eyes. Her gold eyes really looked sharp like a wild beast's for a second. But soon they changed back to a worried, and sad gaze.

"You're really a nice girl."(renji)

"What, so suddenly?"

"Anybody who gets sad for their friends is a nice person."

In front of me, Ms Francesca remained seated, unmoving.

Considering the time I took getting treated by Yayoi-chan, the next match should be pretty soon.

My next match was with———that red haired merc, who defeated Ms Francesca.

“Renji, isn’t sad?”

“I am still in the tournament after all, I don’t have time to be sad.”

“.....then Renji is, a bad person?”

“Yeah, that’s right.”

Saying that, I walked towards Ms Francesca. I wasn’t even trying to be quiet about it yet she didn’t notice me come at all.

She must be still thinking about the match she lost and nothing else.

I can understand. I as well, back then——when I was still a burden for everyone else, was always being worried about it. The more you worry though, the more you make your comrades worry for you as well, I realized that.

“Yo.”

“———!!”

Her delicate shoulders shook greatly.

And her head turned to look towards me.

“Can I sit, beside you?”(renji)

“.....ye, yes of course.”

[Finally, you're here huh?]

Apologetic or rather, in a very sad voice, Ms Francesca replied. Along with Ermenhilde's voice resounding in my head. I sat down a little space away from her on the same bench.

“Seriously, you're not blessed at all are you?”(renji)

[....muu. Well, I do apologise deeply for that.]

“Are you a politician?”

As if we were talking in some different language, there was almost no reaction from Ms Francesca.

Looks like she really did take the loss hard.

“Say, Ms Francesca..”(renji)

“ye, yes?”

“.....”

She rubbed her nose and he replied with a stammer. I'm sure she is.....

You did your best. It was a regrettable result. Let's work hard next time as well. Just take part next year. You'll definitely win next time.

I came up with all sorts of words to say but I hesitated to say all of those. I am different from Ms Francesca. The troubles and suffering I went through are also different from what she's feeling right now.

But, just like when I wanted to be alone, and didn't want to talk to anyone. If someone stood silently by you till your feelings calmed down, it is really helpful, I know that. At least for me, that is.

That's why, in the end, without being able to say anything next, I just sat there on the bench looking forward. Giving a glance, I saw Mururu worriedly looking towards us, or rather, at Ms Francesca.

I wonder how much time passed after that.

I felt a few glances here and there and on looking I saw a few nobles chatting while looking at us. When I looked back at them, they panicked and averted their gazes.

It was the same for Mururu as well, though she looked like an adventurer.....judging by her ears and tail that stood out, she must not be thinking of them very highly. But still the fact that she didn't go away showed how much worried she was for Ms Francesca.

At first I thought she was a girl of few words but deep inside she's a pretty

nice girl.

“Did you calm down a bit?”(renji)

“——-yes.”

[I see. I'll say this once more but, you did fight well Francesca.]

“yes.”

She replied back to Ermenhilde, but her voice still seemed to be dissatisfied.

I didn't watch the battle but she must not have been able to perform well due to nervousness. She must have been unable to truly use everything she had. That must be her biggest regret right now.

“Now then, it's time for my next match soon.”(renji)

“Ah.”

As if she just realized something, Ms Francesca made a loud noise.

Wondering what's wrong, I looked back at her only to see her bowing again.

“What's wrong?”(renji)

“Ah, no, even though Renji-sama has the next match, you were still by my side here.....”

“Don’t worry about it. I was more worried about you rather than my next match.”

[.....You, really can hit on girls as smoothly as breathing, can’t you?]

“That’s not it. What did you hear that as, you idiot.”

[idiot? Who did you just call an idiot!]

Seeing our usual banter, Ms Francesca, though only a small one, she gave a laugh.

As expected, beauties look better smiling rather than sad. It’s charming.

“I’m very sorry, Renji-sama.”(fran)

“hm?”

“I, wasn’t able to get to the second round.”

“—yeah..”

“Even though I even promised to fight you in the second round...”



“Don’t worry about it.”

I rested my back to the back of the chair again.

“Don’t look down, look ahead. If you keep looking downwards, you won’t be able to see others’ faces.”

“.....”

“Even when you’re down, when you’re sad, when you’re in pain, look ahead, and look around you.”

When I said that, her face rose up a bit.

Not ahead, she looked at me.

“So, who do you see?”(renji)

“.....Renji-sama..”

“No, not me.”

Smiling wryly, I gestured her to look around her a bit.

And getting the hint, when she looked towards Mururu, she made a small

noise.

“Mururu-chan.....

“When you worry all alone, you only keep on feeling down more and more. Look around you more, you’ll definitely find a sign of some sorts.”

That can be a friend, a comrade or some kind of small motive even.

But still, that will definitely be your first step forward.

When you’re stumped, panicking, just remember these words at that time.

“O’Brien-san——these are the words of the strongest knight of this country.”(renji)

“——”

“At least for now, Ms Francesca, you’re not alone. You have friends who are worried for you.”

Did she realize our gazes, Mururu hid a bit in embarrassment.

But, the fact that her tail was still visible really made it look cute.

.....It’s very hard to protect your promises.

I know that very well.

No matter how much effort you put, no matter how much you struggle, there will be times when you simply will not be able to protect it.

But still, people make promises.

Promises connect people to people. It's one of the most precious kind of bond. And because you know how strong those bonds can be, we still make promises. Because we want to be connected with someone else. Because we cannot live all alone.

[So Renji, it's about time for your next match I think.]

"Ah."

"Is it already that time?"(renji)

Answering Ermenhilde, I stood up from my bench.

So next is that red haired mercenary eh? Honestly speaking, just seeing his muscles makes me wish that I didn't have to fight him.

"We really couldn't talk much."(renji)

"No, thank you very much."(fran)

It seems, talking with her has diverted her thoughts a bit.

Her expression was the usual smile she made. My chest also felt lighter seeing that as I swung around my right arm a few times.

“My next match, watch carefully.”(renji)

“Eh?”

[Oh that’s rare. For Renji to say something like that.]

I know that as well.

I shrugged at her words

“Well, for once, I am being called her master so might as well act the part a bit, I guess.”(renji)

“Eh, umm.”(fran)

“You seem to be bad against enemies with big weapons. I’ll show you how to deal with large sword users.”

Be sure to watch carefully. Saying that lightly, I started walking.

Somehow, I really am bad at making such declarations.

When, Mururu came out from her hiding.

“Thanks.”(mururu)

“Your tail wasn’t hidden you know?”

When I said that, Mururu quickly held down her tail. Seeing her rare slightly embarrassed expression, I smiled.

At first she was completely expressionless.....well not that much but still she wasn’t very expressive either. She has grown, or rather, changed.

“I’ll leave Ms Francesca to you now.”(renji)

“Renji is?”

“I have my next match.”

I’m not really enthusiastic about it though.

When I shrugged saying that, Mururu simply said ‘I see’, and went back to looking at Ms Francesca.

I guess she’s clearly more worried about her than me it seems. How lonely, and sad. Seriously.

“You okay?”(mururu)

“Hm?”

While continuing to look towards her, she asked that to me.

“Can you win against the next one?”(mururu)

“Well, who knows.”

I guess she was slightly worried.

What do I do, I feel happy just from that much.....what is this really?

“Win.”(mururu)

And saying that, she looked at me.

Unusual for Mururu, her gaze held what you’d call a strong will in it.

.....I guess it must be because my opponent is the guy who beat Ms Francesca.

“I’ll try my best.”(renji)

“Promise?”(mururu)

“.....”

“Promise me.”

She really likes her friends huh.

Looking at such wonderful friendship, I felt like working harder. Was it because I was starting to grow old?

“Yeah, sure. It’s a promise.”

“hm.”

It seems she was quite satisfied by my answer as she walked away towards Ms Francesca.

.....Really, I’m so lonely.

I’ve been told to win but she isn’t really worried for me. What is this? Renji-san is so lonely Mururu. Couldn’t you have, you know, said it in a more gentler way?

As I walked away feeling my legs get a bit heavy, I suddenly felt another gaze.

It wasn’t the same as the ones I had felt all this time, it was more——

“———”

Looking towards the source of the gaze, it was a single woman.

With honey coloured hair and a passionate-looking red dress. And the strength of her sharp gaze truly suited her dress.

Who was it? Just when I was thinking of that, seeing I had realized her gaze, she turned and walked away. The direction was towards the spectator stands for nobles.

.....So she’s a noble, eh?



Well, considering the luxurious dress she was wearing, she had to be a noble.

“Well, whatever.”

She was a pretty woman , while thinking of that, I walked away.

Normally, this would be the time where Ermenhilde would make a tsukkomi about it but.....aah, I’m really lonely.

## Interlude 7

(Masaki POV)

While I was spending time observing the matches while leaning on the stone wall, someone came beside me.

There, a good friend of mine who wasn't much taller than me—Souichi-kun was standing. He wasn't in his uniform like yesterday, instead he was wearing thick, yet easy to move in normal clothes.

On his waist was one of the mass produced swords given to the participants. While feeling a bit disappointed at seeing that, I turned back to observing the matches.

“How does it look?”(souichi)

“Just so-so, I guess?”(masaki)

Did he understand what I meant, Souichi-kun didn't speak anything more.

In front of me, on the arena ring, the one who was fighting was Yamada-san. While skilfully using the short sword he doesn't normally use, he was handling the opponents large sword.

The fact that he was fighting even more fluidly than when he was fighting

against the Knight Commander. Looks like he's gotten rid of his nervousness properly this time. Not to mention, his opponent right now is levels below O'brien-san as well. I think right now Yamada-san must be feeling much more free in the ring than the first round. There was no wastage in his movements, in fact he even seemed to be relaxed.

He has a habit to over think everything a little. Though it might be troublesome to not think much like I do as well, but I'm sure his habit to overthink isn't proper either. If you stay over concerned about something, your head gets filled with nothing but that problem and your body automatically becomes restricted.

That's why, I think that after finally winning against the man that he hadn't won even once before, he's finally gotten rid of one of his shackles.

He's really easy to understand. Seriously, what a strange man.

"Somehow, niichan's fighting style feels strange."(sou)

"yeah. Using a short sword against a large sword—-Probably, he's teaching your senpai how to do it?"(masaki)

What was her name again?

When I brought that up, Souichi-kun went 'Ohh' as if he also realized it.

"To Francesca-senpai, eh?"(sou)(T/N: hereon I'm using 'sou' for souichi.)

“Right right, that girl.”

Since she fought in front of me as well, I remember her face.

Yamada-san’s disciple.

For his disciple, her movements are rough, though she did match his style of fighting, it felt more like she had taught that herself by somehow mimicking it instead.

Certainly, she had a similar fighting style to Yamada-san—to all of us. Dodging attacks with speed and making certain hits in the openings of the opponent.

But she was still had faults in her attacking. Both timing and speed, were odd. It’s amazing how she even survived travelling with Yamada-san with just that much. Well, I doubt his current journey is anywhere as dangerous as his previous one though.

Above all, she was still hesitant in slashing against humans. Like that, it’d be impossible to keep on winning in this tournament.

“Oh right, Senpai lost didn’t she.”(sou)

“.....you know, she is your senpai, shouldn’t you have at least gone and seen her?”

“ugh. What could I do, the timing with my match was just too bad.....”

It seems he felt a bit guilty about it as well as he scratched his head awkwardly.

“Anyway, there’s still time till your next match right? Why are you here, Souichi-kun?”(masaki)

“Nothing. Was just wondering how you were doing, that’s all.”

“What’s this? Wore you worried for onee-san?”

“What ‘onee-san’.....You’re just an year older than me.”

“Doesn’t change the fact that I am older though, does it?”

As if he was dissatisfied, he pouted making him look really cute. That part of him was so childish, or rather, so adorable. My right hand almost moved to hug him but I used my will to stop myself. If I did that in such a crowded place, I’ll be labelled as a pervert. I’m not Rin-san! (T/n:Kudou Rin)

“Masaki-san, what’s wrong?”(sou)

Looks like I was staring at his face a bit too much as he looked at me confusedly.

Why is this boy so innocently pure? No, I’m sure he’s not that much but, how should I say this.....he feels like a small animal. It’ll be a different kind of problem if he was actually like Yamada-san or that muscle daruma Itou-san, but still why does he feel so different even though he’s also a guy? Really, men are

strange creatures.

“Umm, so, do you need something?”(masaki)

“Nah, I just came to check up on you.”

“Eh?”

“Well, your next to next opponent will be Renji-niichan right? I was worried that you might get a bit too eager about it, that’s all.”

“.....shouldn’t you be more worried for Yamada-san then?”

Folding my arms in front of me, I spoke that feeling slightly disappointed.

I am happy that Souichi-kun was worried for me, even more so that he came all the way to me and talked to me but, it feels strange that he was more worried for me.

Fighting Yamada-san.....well, I was the one who made the challenge but I’m not going to go crazy about it.

I’m simply unhappy about how he hid away for a whole year making everyone worry that’s all.

At least he could have sent a letter or two to tell if he was fine or not. I knew that he hates going through trouble and is a bad writer as well but still, I didn’t

expect him to be the type who'd make his comrades worry like that.

That's why I was relived after finally seeing him again but still his aloof/detached part of him was.....well, yeah. At least, apologise for once! That's all I wanted.

Well, I'm just trying to vent my anger but it looks like Souichi-kun thinks I'm just very eager to fight him.

"Niichan, though like that, does take it seriously when he needs to after all."(sou)

"Really? He still seems pretty absentminded most of the time to me though."

"Well, he does, yeah."

Saying that and giving a bitter smile, Souichi-kun turned to look at the arena.

On the arena ring, Yamada-san was still clashing swords with the random mercenary. Yes, just clashing swords. That wasn't even a fight anymore. It looked more like the swordsman called Yamada Renji was showing the skills he knew and had learned from his experience.

That.....Francesca was it? I wonder if she can even understand why Yamada-san was using a short sword.

Thinking that, I gave a sigh.

“How should I say this—— I thought he had changed but there are parts that haven’t changed at all in Yamada-san as well.”(masaki)

“Yeah.”

Even on this great stage, Yamada-san was fighting not for himself but for another person. That part of him hasn’t changed at all.

Not for himself, but for someone else. Always.

As someone who cannot fight otherwise——I guess, that part of him would never ever change.

“But if he could change a bit, it’d be great if he could treat Yuuko-san a bit more nicely.”(masaki)

“I wish that he’d more nicer to Aya though.”(sou)

Saying that, he dropped his shoulders.

When I looked at him, he simply gave a wry smile while giving a shrug. That gesture really didn’t suit him at all as rather than looking cool, looking cute suits him much more.

“I’m the one who has to deal with the repercussions, after all.”(sou)

“That’s just probably because you’re just too thickheaded.”



“.....I’m not that thickheaded, I think.”

But, he doubted himself on that as well it seems as he averted his gaze with stiff face.

Looks like he has been told that a few times by his friends at school as well maybe. It felt like that.

Also, Souichi-kun is definitely dense. I can say that with sure confidence and pride.

“What do you think, Souichi-kun?”

“Hm?”

“About Yamada-san.....he’s, keeping some sort of secret you know?”

“———”

His stiff face stiffened even more as he turned towards Yamada-san fighting in the arena. I as well turned to look at him.

An year ago, he was the type of guy who used to laugh a lot. But, in what I have seen for the past few weeks, he rarely laughs. No, even when he laughs on the surface, if you were to ask if that was from the bottom of his heart, I’ll have to shake my head. That’s kind of smile the current Yamada-san always has.

“I know.”(sou)

As I thought, Yamada-san really is easy to understand.

The moment when our fight with the Demon God was settled. We all clearly remember the fury he released at that moment.

Yamada-san had never been that angry ever before. But at that moment, he revealed his complete anger, so much that even all of us felt scared of him, and even now I can never forget his back as he madly rushed at the Demon God.

I’m sure, everyone has realized it. They have realized it, yet nobody dares to ask.

And that man, as long as we don’t ask, he won’t talk about it I think.

——Eru. We felt her magical energy incredibly weaken, and then, the earth was cut apart and the sky was split open, and the Demon God, who could regenerate from even a small piece of flesh, was completely obliterated, so completely that we couldn’t even sense a single bit of him.

“But still, I want to wait till Renji-niichan tells us about it himself.”(sou)

“And you’re fine with that?”

“Yeah.”

Muu.

That, when he makes that ‘I believe in oniichan!’ face, even I can’t say anything further.

I’m sure Aya would make the same face as well. Was it because they were childhood friends, or was it because they both trusted Yamada-san with all of their heart?

The fact that I don’t find it agreeable is probably because the fact that Souichi-kun likes Yamada-san more.....fills me with this sense of weird rivalry, or should I say jealousy, I’m sure. I can’t deny it. Or rather, I don’t even want to think about losing to a man in such a thing!

I know why Souichi-kun thinks so highly of Yamada-san, after all, I’ve seen such a scene countless times. No matter how many monster stood in front, even against giant descendants of the Demon God, even against the Demon Lord both me and Souichi-kun couldn’t defeat even together—he, Yamada-san, stood in front of all of us. Without making an excuse that he was the weakest, he treated us as children because he was an adult.....and his back felt big enough, worthy enough for him to say that.

But still, it’s normal to want to be the number one person of the guy you like right? I’m sure I’m not wrong to wish that he’d look more at me than Yamada-san.

Rather than feeling worried for me, I want him to rely on me more.

But the person who has become my first love was focusing not at me who was standing right beside him but more at the arena. If this isn't being dense, what is? If he was just acting to not notice my feelings, I would have cut his head apart.

But, because he really hasn't noticed at all.....I can only sigh.

"Haah."

"What's wrong, Masaki-san?"(sou)

"Nothing."

I spoke in such a displeased voice that even I myself noticed.

I wonder if that was due to Yamada-san for being so secretive or was it because the person I love was standing right beside me yet felt far away.

But oh well, it's not like I have confessed my feelings to him either. I don't intend to hide my feelings but as someone who hasn't spoken it directly, I'm not really in the position to call him dense.

Once again, I sighed.

To change my mood, I rested my hand on the katana on my waist.

"I really want to cut Yamada-san already..."(masaki)

“Scary!?”

“Well, rather than worry about difficult things, it’s easier for me to just move my body.”

Whatever happened back then, it won’t help no matter how much we think about it.

We were all there during the battle between Yamada-san and the Demon God Nayfell but we still don’t know exactly what happened. So, we should focus more on what we can do right now.

In my case, it’s to vent all my resentment, or rather anger, no my emotions of having made us worry for a whole year at Yamada-san.

“Then, I’ll accompany you as well.”

“Ara, really?”

I brought my lips closer to Souichi-kun’s ears as he dropped his shoulders while saying that. Did I succumb to temptation or just got too courageous? Giving a few glances around, it seemed everyone else was too busy with themselves and weren’t paying attention at us. Of course, neither Yayoi-chan nor Rin-san, who’d interrupt me at such times, were here either. As I took a quick breath to calm my fast beating heart, I smelled a boy’s sweat—so as to speak, I could smell Souichi-kun slightly.

“Then, will you accompany me tonight?”(masaki)

“Yeah, sure.”

“———”

No, wait, well, uh..

“I, I see.”(masaki)

“It’s really fun training with you after all.”

“.....I should have known.”

Being looked at with such an innocent face, as he joined his hands behind his head and gave a smile, I felt like punching him right in the face but.....at the same, time I lost the will to explain what I truly meant.

Was it because I lacked guts or was it because I’m simply incompetent?.....  
Wait, they’re both the same.

Looking away, my face stiffened. When I gave a sidelong glance at him, Souichi-kun was looking at me with a confused face.

Could it be that he thinks of me as a complete fight loving maniac? Even if it’s not that, it was clear that he wasn’t aware of me as a woman of the opposite gender.

“What’s wrong, Masaki-san?”(sou)

And as expected, without realizing my intentions, he asked that.

His truly confused face was painful.

Even though the strength in my arm resting on my katana grew, it’s not anything bad right?

“Ah.”

At the same time, inside my head the [voice] resounded as it announced the name of the winner.

It was Yamada-san.

Well, that wasn’t a surprise. On the arena, Yamada-san, while breathing slightly heavily, was holding out an arm to help the mercenary who was on his knees using his large sword as a support.

At the same time, I removed my hand from above my katana and lightly smacked my own cheeks. Though there was also the fact that it felt imprudent to be like this before my match, but above all I just didn’t want anyone to realize how red my cheeks were getting.

“What happened?

“It’s nothing, you thickhead.”(masaki)

“.....Eeeehh??”

From what I’ve seen, Yamada-san’s fighting style hasn’t changed. Dodge an attack, deflect it, and attack in the opening to end it. It was different from the pure overpowering smashing he did on that day. It was the original way he used to fight. Looking at it, I felt relieved yet slightly disappointed as well.

As someone who has seen Yamada-san’s true rage, I want to fight that Yamada-san but——the constraints put on Eru. I don’t know what the seventh is. And, above all to truly anger someone you have trust in is.....painful to my heart as well.

For now, let’s wish that maybe someday I can get to fight Yamada-san at his full strength.

And it looks like Yamada-san had noticed us quite a while ago as he was looking at us from the arena. Souichi-kun was giving a wide smile and I was.....probably smiling, I think. Probably.

Haah.

“So next is your fight right?”(sou)

“Yeah.”



I released the strength in my arm resting on my katana.

I did confirm my opponent's name just in case but it wasn't anyone I knew of. Just an experienced adventurer but oh well.

"Do your best!"(sou)

While looking at the person I like cheer for me like that, I gave a sigh.

The mercenary that fought Yamada-san passed by me but he was actually a bright one. It was the face of a man who was satisfied that he'd done his best in that fight.

Turning my gaze back from that man, I saw Souichi making a troubled, somewhat unsure of how to respond face.

".....Why did you sigh?"(sou)

"Tonight. Don't you forget our promise to accompany me in my training, okay?"

"su, sure?"

But I'm sure, hindrances will be there as well. While thinking of that, I headed towards the arena. While thinking of the faces of the hindrances that will come, I stood on the arena.

It's where Yamada-san had been fighting till now.

Against me, stood a man.

Now then,

I'm not nervous at all. My breathing is perfect and can clearly hear the sound of the audience.

When I gave a pleasant smile, my opponent's face went pale.....isn't that reaction a bit too rude?

I thought that but oh well, whatever. I'm going to use him to release all my frustration now.

While smiling, I put my hand on my katana's grip. Lowering my waist, I loosened up my body.

I sharpened my mind, you could say. The man in front of me took a stance with his sword but, I calmly observed him. Neck, elbow, wrist, knee—heart. All the vital parts were in plain sight, and I had to suppress my body to instantly rush in before the match was declared start.

And even among the countless cheers, I heard the sound of my katana unsheathe, very clearly.

## Chapter 55: Sword and Katana

(TN note: After thinking a while, I've decided to change Masaki-chan's 'demonic sword' to 'magic sword' from here onwards cuz, logically speaking it's weird for the heroes to be using anything 'demonic' after all. I don't even know why I decided to even use 'demonic' in the first place. Maybe because it sounded cooler? .....Yeah, that must be it -\_-')

The longsword in my hand, felt really heavy.

How many times had I thought that already——?

.

.

For the Nth time, huge cheers rose as I stood in the arena.

Those cheers were not for the 'human' Yamada Renji, but for the Hero of salvation.

While knowing that, looking at loud excited cheering of the crowd, I ended up servicing them by waving my hand to them a bit as well.

“You look pretty relaxed.”

“Really?”(renji)

“Yes, a bit too relaxed.”

Looks like my opponent doesn't think that I'm very serious right now. I feel like that red haired merc said something similar in the second round as well but I honestly think that I'm in a pretty serious mood right now.

Frankly speaking, among all the participants of this tournament, there is not a single one against whom I can say that [I'll definitely win]. In fact, I can't even let down my guard even slightly against any of them either.

Steeling myself so much, I'm actually tiring myself mentally.

Paying no regard to my inner thoughts, Masaki-chan looked at me with a chilly gaze. If I had some weird fetish, her gaze might have made me feel all excited. While thinking of such really inappropriate things, I faced her.

“So?”

“Hm?”(renji)

“Against me, will you at least fight seriously?”

“.....I was pretty serious even in the first and second rounds though...”

While scratching my cheek, I replied.

At the same time, I began to hear the magic [voice] that I had finally gotten used to.

But this time, the voice wasn't the usual one. Instead, it was a very familiar one——Utano-san's voice. She began our introductions.

Hearing her first introduce herself before talking, I realized that she was always so diligent with everything. Thinking that, I smiled slightly.

“Haah.”

Clearly noticing my reaction, Masaki-chan gave a sigh.

The sigh she gave while dropping her shoulders was heavy, and deep.....You don't have to be like that. Now I'll start feeling as if it's all my fault seeing a sigh like that.

“You sure are well loved by everyone.”(masaki)

“n.....muu”

“She's worried for you isn't she. She basically going so far just to show that she is with you, even if its only a bit.”

Saying that in an almost teasing voice, I wonder how much did she mean seriously and how much she meant as a joke. As she talked while giving an exaggerated shrug, she really looked like Koutarou when he jokes around. If I

said that, she'd slit my throat without even waiting for the start signal though.

Or maybe, she meant all of it seriously.

When I hesitated to reply, she stepped in even more. But, for once, seeing her talk of such things instead of just about fighting, I guess she's in a pretty good mood. In fact, that's way better.

The only thing I could think of was that it must be something related to Souichi.....or worst case, just because she is getting to fight me.

"What, did something good happen with Souichi or something?"(renji)

".....muu."

Oh. Looks like I hit the right answer on the first try.

Her teasing expression, for a second, seriously just for an instant, turned into a surprised one as she looked at me.

How easy to understand. A girl in love is really adorable to see.

"I see, I see. So you were able to take a step forward with him, eh?"(renji)

"Shut up."(masaki)

She spoke that in a low tone. Her voice that seemed to come from the depths

of her stomach could have made the heart of anyone who hears it tremble with fear.

But, I'm used to that as well. I was very familiar with her as she is one of my trusted comrades after all. I didn't consider it scary or frightening. In fact seeing as how she normally acts so dignified, this was actually amusing. Maybe I was pretty fearless in a way?

"Yeah yeah, sure. I have no intention of turning a person's love story into a joke after all."(renji)

"guh."

Finding Masaki-chan to be cute as she was lost for words, I drew my sword from the sheathe.

I used a short sword to teach Ms Francesca how to use it against large sword users but as expected, I can't do something like that against Masaki-chan.

She pretty serious when it comes to fighting. Even if its among comrades, she won't like it if I held back my strength.

But, in this world, to fight without holding back, even as training, means that it can be dangerous. She likes swords, loves to swing her katana and loves to fight. It's not like I don't understand her feelings but I hope she'd at least try to understand my feelings of not wanting to hurt her as well.

And because it was almost always Souichi who'd go along with her training, at some point training became a daily routine for her.

It must be because her partner was also a fighter of similar strength, she must have thought he'd be able to do anything she can easily as well, or something like that. That's quite the dangerous way of thinking though. If they made a mistake anywhere, it won't end with getting just a small injury for them. Or rather, there has been a few times where Yayoi-chan had to heal either of the two due to some mishap. And they tried to hide that fact from us as well.

At least they do understand that they would have gotten scolded. That makes it even worse though.

"Well, you'll probably be fighting Souichi in the finals. Why don't you win and ask him to listen to anything you say?"(renji)

"Eh?"

"Well, isn't that a common trope? 'If I win listen to anything I say! I'll do the same if I lose!', Right?"

When I said that jokingly, Masaki-chan looked at me with a blank expression.

"So there was such a tactic!"(masaki)

".....Oniisan's happy to see that your brain is useless as usual."(renji)(T/N: renji refers to himself as oniisan in third person)

"Wh-Who're you calling useless!"



Oh well.

Swinging around my longsword a few times, I checked its condition. I did say that I could win, but in the end, this is a sword fight.

No matter how much I try to distract her concentration, once we get into battle, it'll be useless. That's how incredible Masak-chan's power to concentrate in battle is.

Since I knew that, I wanted to at least try and disturb her concentration even if only a bit but——Utano-san's [voice] didn't allow me much time for it.

Our introductions were finished. All that was left was for us to take stance before declaring the start of battle.

“——”

“——”

Hah.

Looks like we were both thinking of the same thing.

Just by matching our gazes, I felt as if our thoughts overlapped as well.

Hisaki Masaki. The girl who wished for a sword that could [Cut through even fate] from the Goddess Astraera.

In terms of attack power, she isn't behind even the Brave who has the divine protection of both the Goddess and the Spirit God. Against the magic sword user, and without Ermenhilde, even 10 of me can't win probably.

While thinking of that, I lowered my waist. Just like Masaki-chan took stance for her quick sword draw, I also took a stance while holding my sword with both hands and almost hiding it near the left side of my waist. Depending on your view, it might look like we had the same stance. The only difference was that her sword was still in the sheathe and mine wasn't.

Just like that, we waited for a few moments for the signal to start.

The cold win caressed my cheeks and the loud cheers felt very far away. As if there was some barrier around me and the only things inside it were me and Masaki-chan.

The world became slow and my concentration reached its peak and it felt like I could even see the wind itself. Forgetting how to even blink, I focused on the opponent in front of me. My opponent was the same as me as nothing except me reflected in her eyes. Right now, she's probably isn't thinking of Souichi even faintly.

I took a breath, a deep, long, and uniform breath. We both did. Mine and Masaki-chan's consciousness, thoughts and even breathing were matched. The little space for us to fight, the arena, felt like it was infinitely large and as if only we two were the only beings alive in this world.

The next instant. A slightly stronger wind blew. Her long, black hair covered her vision as it swayed in the air.

At the same time, the signal to start came.

Without wasting even a second, I leaped in closing the distance between us. Nobody will all this unfair, not even she herself. By the time her eyes, that had been covered by her hair for only an instant, met with my eyes, I had already taken 2 big steps towards her.

Without feeling even a bit surprised at my actions, Masaki-chan's waist lowered even further.

And she drew her sword.

The moment I realized that, I stepped in right in front of her. At the same time as I swung my longsword, her Katana was drawn out and rushed towards my neck even faster than my sword. There was no sense of hesitation or holding back in her attack.

Her skill was flawless as her katana came from her sheathe, towards my neck in the least amount of time and distance possible. The slash was so perfect that it looked like a straight line.

But that's why, it was too easy to predict.

As I aimed my longsword towards directly the trajectory of her katana, the perfect slash was instantly shaken.

Because it was so perfectly executed, her movements were easy to predict. If

I knew what she'd aim for, if I could tell the path of her katana, there were countless steps I could take to fend against it.

As I deflected the katana's trajectory by scooping it away with my sword, a loud metallic sound resounded.

"tch."(masaki)

"Wa——"

I was hoping to either break her katana or at least bend it with my attack but Masaki-chan's reaction was even faster.

As expected of a person who has the divine protection of the Goddess. Her reaction speed was multiple times faster than even O'brien-san. At the same time as my longsword was diverting her attack, she quickly changed the trajectory of her katana to reduce the burden taken from my attack.

Katana and Sword.

The biggest difference between those two is the sharpness, and endurance I believe. A katana swung by a swordswoman like Masaki-chan can cut through even steel but katana's have low endurance. If not for a magic sword made through the power of the Goddess, I doubt they can be used for long in a battlefield.

In contrast, a normal sword was more used to chop/hack down the opponent rather than slice/cut through. But its endurance far surpassed that of a katana. Because they're made solely with use on the battlefield in mind, I guess it

should be obvious.

If I had a way to win against Masaki-chan, it would be to break her katana. That's the only way.

In terms of physical ability, reaction speed, in basically everything, I am below her so that's the only choice I have. That was, to destroy her katana in the very first clash of our weapons when she'd be sure to clash swords properly with me.

But, it ended in failure.

I tried to quickly open up the distance between us but, she won't let me. As I stepped backwards, she began to speedily step in towards me. Her drawn katana was once more in the sheathe before I even knew it and she rushed at me head front with her waist more lowered than even mine who had already drawn the sword.

By lowering her body so much, it made it difficult for me to attack her. Even if I try to attack, it would be too difficult for me to aim at her properly. Even if I swung my sword, I wouldn't be able to bring out enough power behind my swing.

With that kind of weak swing, her katana would split me instead.

"fuuh!!"

She drew her katana again. I dodged her swift slash not by jumping back but by leaping to the left.

Since I jumped away quickly without trying to maintain my form, I was able to avoid her attack with just some of my upper skin of my right arm getting cut but, I ended up rolling on the arena instead.

It looked pretty pathetic, but I quickly stood up and prepared my sword.

Once more, she rushed in towards me with almost enough power to break the stone floor, but this time to match her, I also plunged in towards her centre.

Before, I feinted that I was going to jump back first before changing my direction. But that won't work again. At least not in this fight.

Then, rather than stop the blade, I stepped in to block her attack directly from her grip which couldn't cut me no matter what. But it seems my movement was seen through as she didn't sheathe her katana this time. Rather than using her draw technique the third time, she made a normal slash. But the slash she made was probably even sharper than Souichi's---

"Guh---!?!"

I quickly held up my longsword as a shield but it cut through like it was butter. What the hell is that katana even made of? That sharpness is unreal!

While chasing that slash with my eyes, I put strength in my legs.

A slash isn't the only way a katana can cut. After a swing, one could pull the katana to cut once more.

After cutting my long sword, she pulled her sword. That was just a very slight movement but she must do that action to cut my body as well.

That instant. In the time of a single blink, where the katana was about to touch my waist—I matched my movements with her and, with my left leg as the centre, I rotated my body. My clothes were cut, and a slight, shallow cut was made on my flank/side. While definitely feeling the sharp pain, I knew that my body was still in one piece.

As I held down my side with my right hand, a wet feeling came to me. A slight amount of blood was sticking to my hand but, I'm still alive—I can still fight.

As I quickly turned my gaze to look towards Masaki-chan who I had lost sight of due to rotating away my body, but she was just standing there looking at me with surprised face. I guess, she really didn't expect me to dodge her attack with that kind of manoeuvre.

“—Ha.”

I wonder was it me or Masaki-chan who laughed.

If it was me, it must be a stiff, and miserable face.

The long sword had been cut apart and had become the size of a short sword. But, because her katana was incredibly sharp, my sword wasn't broken and could still be used as a weapon.

While looking at Masaki-chan who stopped due to surprise, I lowered my waist and rushed in towards her. This time, I held the sword near my waist as I charged towards her in the shortest distance.

I feel, that me and Masaki-chan are the same.

Souichi and Masaki-chan both don't want to lose to each other as [swordsmen/women] but their sword and katana were different.

But in me and Masaki-chan's case——It's the same. There was literally no difference.

How safely, without making the slightest waste, in the easiest way possible——can I cut the enemy, can I kill them. That's what our lifeline is, and you could say, also the core, spine of our fighting style.

As her unsheathed katana aimed for my neck, I aimed for her heart at the same time.

Her slash, and my stab. If you were to ask what's faster, it would always be the stab.

That is——only considering the full length of the longsword.

“guh.....unu——”



“.....haah.”

The sharp edge of the katana was touching my neck. That sensation alone felt like it could take away 10 years from my lifespan.

In comparison, my sword——had not reached Masaki-chan’s heart. The part of the sword that had been cut away by the katana had made all the difference.

And inside my head, Utano-san’s [voice] resounded.

It was my loss.

“uuuuuu.”

“eh, umm.”(renji)

As Masaki-chan glared at me while moaning and teary eyes, I was perplexed.

For the time being, that face is super scary so I’d be happy if you could take the katana away from my neck though. If she were to pull her katana right now, my carotid artery would pop, killing me.

“This..”(masaki)

“This?”

“This, isn’t ..!”

Well, honestly speaking, when we went for the kill, even I thought that I'd win.

And, Masaki-chan, who had become sure of her victory at that had stopped her movement already. That was the difference.

In the battlefield, it would be a deadly opening. But this was a duel not the battlefield. As a result, Masaki-chan was the winner and I was the loser. That fact cannot be debated.

But, it seems that to Masaki-chan, this isn't acceptable/satisfactory.

If my weapon was Ermenhilde instead, it would have never been cut nor would it have broken. Then maybe the result would have been the opposite.

.....but then, from the start, she would have come at her full strength to cut me as well. In fact that one would be even difficult for me to beat.

"Even though I was hoping to beat you up today and release my anger for making us all worry by disappearing for a whole year!!"

" ....."

Since she was making a truly regretful expression, she really must be speaking truthfully.

Yeah. Oniichan's happy that you've grown up to be so honest.

“Ummm.”

“Guh. Don’t think that you’ve won here!!”(masaki)

How should I say this.....amazing.

She sounds exactly like those villains from those tokusatsu series. (T/N: tokusatsu= super sentai, kamen rider etc.)

I looked at her back as Masaki-chan sheathed her katana and walked away fuming. What is this.....am I at fault here? No, well I am in a way.

I understand that Masaki-chan was trying to resolve my actions for the past one year in her own way. In fact, now I look totally like villain instead. At least, from the point of view of my comrades.

That said, if I had gone easy on her, it would have made her even more pissed.

“Haah. She must be in her difficult age right now, seriously.”(renji)

For the time being, I decided to put it as that. It seems our fight really roused the crowd as the cheers were even louder than before. I’m not joking, I feel like my ears will go crazy.

“Well, I’ll leave the girl to her lover to deal with.”

If I were to apologise, it'd only make her angrier as well so I decided to put it away all towards Souichi who she'll have to fight in the finals as I walked down the arena.

At least, with this my tournament has finally ended but.....what a bad taste it leaves. Well, no matter how much Masaki-chan went easy on me, I still didn't think I'd get this far.

While thinking of that, I looked at my hand as I opened and closed it. It was the same as always.

"I wonder if I have gotten stronger even a bit."

Well, no matter how strong I get physically, if my mental strength doesn't match up with it, it's useless.

My side gave a sharp pain. It's the wound Masaki-chan gave me. It seems the blood loss hasn't stopped yet.

Seriously, I wish she'd gone a bit more easier on me.

While looking at my hand stained with blood, I smiled bitterly. I put up a good fight to Masaki-chan but seeing how I got hurt, I can't really feel happy.

I'm sure, once more.....I'll make all sorts of people worry for me.

"Optimistically speaking, it was kind of draw eh? Haah.....what use is it

growing stronger now anyways.”

But, oh well.

My life hasn’t ended yet.

Maybe one day I’ll have to protect someone once again, then I need to get stronger.

Grasping my stained right hand tightly, feeling a bit lighter, I walked away.

## Chapter 56: Meaning of Happiness

While putting on the heavy armour once more, I gave a sigh.

The room prepared for me to change was the same as before but with just me alone being here, it felt really quiet. Maybe because I was in the middle of the arena just a while ago, it felt even more quieter here.

Well, both Toudou and Kuuki are busy, and neither do I require help to put on armour so I don't have a reason to call someone else either. After being in the midst of so much noise and cheering, it felt, how should I say this, quite weird putting on armour all alone.

“How lonely.....”

Though there's a part of me that feels that being alone like this makes me feel at ease, and I am truly free but, still, it feels lonely.

Or rather, it must be my imagination that I alone feel a bit left out.

Finally finishing putting on the mithril armour, I attached the mithril sword to my waist. Now if only I have Ermenhilde with me, I'll be set. But she's with Ms Francesca right now.

I thought of looking for her as soon as my battle ended but there are thousands of people inside the Coliseum. To look for Feirona and the others would take a bit too much effort.

If I'm lucky, I'll find Ms Francesca during the banquet, which is basically the after party, that'll be conducted after the tournament ends. And even in the worst case, tomorrow I'll just have to go and meet up with Feirona and the others.

It might be not too bad to spend some time alone like this either. For the past 3 years, we have been together all the time after all. It's necessary for her as well to spend some time with others.

.....thinking like that, I sighed again. Because we've been together for so long, it feels a bit empty, or rather, lonely to be like this.

I'm sure I'll get lonely far more easily than even Ermenhilde I think. While thinking of such foolish things, I left the room.

"Ah."

"Hm?"

When, she was probably waiting in front of the room, Aya was looking out the window before turning to look towards me.

The dress she was wearing was the deep blue dress, the same one she wore on the dinner with me.

It was dark hue dress but it matched well with Aya's white skin. Though I'm not really knowledgeable on the what dress is considered to suit you or not, I

just felt that it really suited Aya.

But unlike that time, her hair weren't let down openly. He had tied them to the side, the same as always, and was currently playing with it with her fingers.

"Is something the matter?"(renji)

"No, nothing."(aya)

Saying that, Aya came beside with light footsteps.

Maybe because she was wearing heels, she felt slightly taller than usual. She had also put on some slight make up as well.

"Just felt like talking with you, for a bit."(aya)

"I see."

Her face, at a height slightly above my shoulder, was giving a bright smile. She really must be in a good mood. Her emotions transferred to even me as I gave a smile as well.

"Well, that was unfortunate, eh?"(aya)

"What was?"

"The fact that you lost."



“Aah.”

She knew that I didn't really mind it much as she spoke that in a light tone and with a smile.

At times, the other contestants and people here in the arena would look at us with curious gazes as we walked by them but I didn't pay them much mind. Call it the price of fame, but both mine and Aya's faces were well known in the capital. Especially mine, since I was in the matches just a while ago.

“But still, it's a pity.”(renji)

“What is?”

“Well, it's a rare festival after all, yet we haven't had the chance to go check out the various stalls and stands.”

“I don't really mind that. I just.....”

Saying till that, she shut her mouth and didn't continue. As she started to fiddle with her hair again, she looked a bit embarrassed.

I don't know why but since her mood didn't seem to be getting bad, I just continued to walk beside her while my armour made a clanking sound.

Even after walking a bit, Aya remained silent. AT the same time, I didn't have much to talk either.

But still, to not be bothered by even such a silence, is probably because I've gotten used to spending time with Aya. As we continued to walk leisurely, I felt Aya's elbow touch my waist portion of the armour.

She must have taken half a step closer to me. The distance between us was a bit closer.

I'm sure it'll be too boorish to point that out so I continued walking, acting like I hadn't noticed.

Giving another glance at her, her smile seemed to have gotten even greater. Or was it just my imagination?

"Did you have lunch yet?" (renji)

"Eh?"

"It's almost lunch time right? Have you had your lunch yet?"

"Eh, ah, yes. Or rather, there was a lot of things to eat back at our spectator seats."

"So basically, you held back and ate less so are still hungry?"

"Ugh.....yes."

I was about to say that'd 'you'll get fat' but I quickly stopped myself. It would be just as a joke but what would happen to me even if it's as a joke is—well, as clear as day.

“Then, accompany me for a bit.”(renji)

“?”

“Now that my fight is over, I suddenly feel really hungry.....will you stay with me for a while?”

“Ye, Yes!”

Giving a wry smile at her enthusiastic response, I changed our direction from going towards our seats to the Coliseum's exit. The coliseum itself didn't have a dinner hall/cafeteria so I just have to go to the various stalls set up just outside the gate to fill up my stomach. Recalling the various snack stalls I saw yesterday, I felt my mouth water up. I was really hungry but I must not have felt it because I was even more nervous about the matches.

“fufufu.”

As I walked at a bit fast pace, Aya beside me gave a small laugh.

Feeling a bit embarrassed at that, I slowed my pace to normal again. But then, I realized I messed up.

I'll really stand out, in the bad sense, in this armour. Normal people can't tell

the difference between normal steel and Mithril but being in full armour alone will make others feel nervous around me. If I was to go out to stalls in such an outfit, I'll definitely stand out.

Well, speaking of that, Aya will be the same. Though its not extravagant, she's still wearing a first-class dress made of good fabric. Wearing heels and with makeup on, she looked like a woman rather than a girl, beautiful rather than cute.

I might be partial to the people I know well but I still feel that Aya will definitely stand out in public right now. Though unlike me, she'd stand out in a good way.

"Should we hurry a bit?"

Maybe she was a bit concerned seeing me walk fast paced just before, she spoke that.

Her voice was more energetic than usual probably because she was having fun teasing me for once instead of being the one getting teased.

"Nah, I can tolerate just this much easily."(renji)

"Mouu.....that part of you is so childish, really."

"Ugh."

Was it really?

Being called a child by a girl 10 years younger than me left a really difficult to explain feelings.

To not let her realize my feelings, I scratched my cheek only to feel the cold touch of mithril. Oh right, I was in full armour right now.

“This might make it a bit difficult to eat in.”(renji)

As I spoke that while looking at the gauntlets I was wearing, Aya burst ut in laughter.

As she laughed while shaking her shoulders, she really looked like a girl of her age making me feel happy just looking at her as well. In the 3 years after coming to this world, she had started to gain that adult-like atmosphere around her but in my opinion, she looks better acting more like a child her age would. As we began to walk again, I felt Aya’s elbow touch my armour covered waist again.

“Does it not feel cold?”(renji)

“What does?”

“My armour.”

When I said that, she quickly moved slightly away understanding what I meant.

Thinking of her actions as cute, I also felt a bit like a lonely parent. It must be

what parents feel when their daughters move away from them, or maybe, I felt lonely as a man to have woman move away from me?

As I smiled bitterly at feelings I myself didn't understand, Aya looked up towards me puzzled.

"Nah, just felt a bit lonely."(renji)

When I said that, she blushed madly and looked away.

"Mou, don't tease me like that!"(aya)

"That wasn't really my intention in the first place though."

She scolded me to hide her embarrassment but still, I didn't sense her mood go bad.

Though not as much as Souichi or Yayoi-chan, I do know what kind of personality Aya has. She's the type to say 'No' clearly when she wants to and when she can't speak up, she'll silently create distance between herself and the other person. And if she doesn't do that means that she truly trusts them. I've seen her hide her embarrassment like that so many times already as well. Rather than saying that I got used to it, it's better to say that I began to enjoy it so much that I started liking spending time with her. That's why, even though it had become silent again, it didn't feel awkward at all.

When we came to this world, she was unsociable, always tried hard as if implying that I should just stay back and leave the rest to her, but seeing her personality now, the gap in between those two personalities was really amusing.

While I was spending time reminiscing, I felt her elbow on my waist again.

When I looked towards her, she quickly averted her gaze to the other side.

“So, it’s not cold?”(renji)

“Well, you looked pretty lonely so..”

When I asked the same thing again, a different reply came.

Hearing her blunt response, I ended up laughing a bit. I felt bad but her reaction was simply too amusing. And above all,— I felt happy.

“Mouu!”(aya)

“Oh, don’t start sulking again.”(renji)

“It’s because you always tease—”

“I’m happy.”

When I said that cutting Aya’s words off, she didn’t continue further.

Her blank expression was so fascinating that I wanted to just keep on looking at her but, maybe she realized my gaze, she quickly hung down her head hiding

her face. She also stopped walking, so I also stopped.

The people around us looked at us with weird gazes.

“What will you do? Want to go back to your seats before me?”(renji)

Implicitly, I asked if this was too much trouble for her.

I’m sure Aya understood what I was asking as well.

But, she quickly shook her head a few times and quickly walked up beside me once again. Her face was smiling, or should I say, grinning, but I shouldn’t tell her that.

Now that she had raised her head back again, I suppressed my urge to tease her more and we continued walking.

Once more, I felt Aya’s elbow touch my waist.

This time, she didn’t move away, and neither did I say anything else either.

After a while, we finally left the Coliseum and while feeling the cold wind outside, I squinted at the strong sunlight.

The weather is really nice. To have not realized that even after going out on the arena multiple times, I realized exactly how nervous I had been.



“Now then, what should we eat?”(renji)

“I’m fine. I’m not feeling very hungry right now.”

“You don’t have to be so mindful you know? I have some change on me so I’ll treat you.”

“No, it’s fine.”

As we talked while walking, as expected, we drew a lot of inquisitive gazes onto us.

Both of us are used to gathering such attention but it’s still weird to eat food like this. As a man, I don’t really mind it much, but for Aya it might not feel very comfortable to eat while under the gaze of countless strangers I guess.

“I see.”(renji)

Though I still doubted any reason to hold back now, for the time being we headed towards a nearby stall and bought one skewered Orc meat. It cost 2 copper coins..... You could buy 4 breads in that amount in a village but I guess it’s not the same in cities. Or maybe this was because a festival was going on currently. It’s really not fair how the cost of normal things get almost doubled during such times. And even while knowing that, we still buy it anyway.

Do we get lax due to feeling joyous during festivals or does everything just feel more tasty at times like these? In either case, I guess the atmosphere and mood is really important.

“What’s wrong?”(aya)

“nah, just thought that this was really tasty.”

While dexterously holding the stick with my gauntlet wearing hands, I took a bite.

This world didn’t have anything called as sauces, thus the only things put on as seasoning was some salt and spices. But that, in turn, enhanced the original taste of the meat even more.

With my little knowledge of cooking, I commented on the taste of the Orc meat.

“Hm, it’s really tasty.”(renji)

“Fufu.”

Aya gave a small giggle as she looked at me eating from the side.

I wonder how the surrounding people are thinking of us right now.

“Want to take a bite as well?”(reji)

“I’ll pass.”

Well, thought so.

Even if we are close comrades, it's still not normal to eat something the other has already taken a bite off. After a while, I finally finished eating the thing. But it only seemed to have increased my appetite; I really must have been hungry.

"But still, the capital sure is crowded."(renji)

"Really?"

"yeah, it feels like it'd be easy to get lost in here."

When I said that, Aya hid her mouth as she gave an refined looking laugh.

Now then, what should I eat next? When I looked around thinking that, my eyes met with few people. Maybe they knew who we were, or were they simply curious about a man in full armour, and woman in a fine dress? Without paying them much mind, I walked off. Aya seemed to be the same.

"Don't get lost okay?"(aya)

"I'll be careful. If I got lost, let's meet up at the entrance to the Arena okay?"

"Mouu, Renji-san's supposed to be the older one here, right?"

As I walked alongside Aya while she listened to my jokes, another stall caught my attention.

This one wasn't selling orc meat, it was lizardman meat instead. It had less fat than orc meat and had more consistency. If it was our original world, it'd be considered a healthy kind of meat.

In this world, healthy food wasn't really a thing so Orc meat was more popular. Even though Lizardmen are more stronger than ORcs, it's a bit weird how their meat is considered of less value.

Buying one of those, I held it with my gauntlet hands once more.

"Well then, since it'll be troublesome to get lost as well, how about we go sit down somewhere?"(renji)

"Yes, let's. Should we buy something to drink?"

"Ah."

Oh right, I forgot to buy anything like that.

"I'll go buy something right now."(renji)

"It's fine. Look for a place to sit first, I'll go buy the drinks."

Before I could say anything, she spoke that and walked away.

Looking at her back as she went away, I gave a sigh.

Isn't the man supposed to go do such stuff— — —or am I too old fashioned for thinking like that. I happy to see Aya being so considerate but at the same time being treated like this by a girl so younger than me feels a bit embarrassing as well.

For the time being, I began looking for a place to sit as told only to find one fairly easily.

There were a lot of people around but, there were very few of them who were actually sitting there and chatting. Everyone else seemed to be moving around enjoying the festival. With smiles, with friends, family, lovers; chatting, holding hands, linking arms with each other; a lot of people, of various different races, were enjoying this festival.

It was peaceful, and calm.....and when I think that we were the ones who protected this, I feel more proud than happy inside my chest. Suddenly, I recalled what Koutarou had told me yesterday night.

[If you're curious, go meet Astraera.]

He said so. That one of my party members was trouble.

Was it Ms Francesca, Feirona or Mururu?

No matter who it is— —if he said that it was trouble, and to go as far as to take Astraera's name.....then it must be really serious.

Astraera. The goddess who made unreasonable demands to us so many times. Starting from subjugating the Demon God, even though we didn't even have a ship, to cross the seas to the Abenelm continent, to somehow gain the trust of Spirit God, to go kill mountain-like big descendants of the Demon God, *etc.*

.....thinking back on it now, it's amazing how we actually fulfilled all of those unreasonable demands. It's just a matter of laughing now but back then, we had to seriously, desperately, put our lives on the line to do those tasks.

For this world———the world Eru loved, the world we came to like so much, where so many people lived, and to protect it all.

Aah, I thought.

I guess my holiday is finally coming to an end.

“Renji-san?”

As I stood there thinking in a daze while still holding the lizard meat, Aya came back up to me. In her hands were 2 wooden cups, and judging by the smell, it must fruit juice.

“Ah, Aya, eh?”(renji)

“.....are you okay?”

“Hm?”

“Ah, um, wouldn’t it better to sit down while eating?”

“Hahaha, yeah, I guess.”

She made a face that seemed like she wanted to ask me something but in the end she never asked it.

While looking at her gently, I sat down on a nearby bench. Aah, really, this armour is inconvenient. It’s hard to even sit.

“Here.”(aya)

“Ah, thanks.”

Taking the juice cup from her, I took a sip and washed it down my throat. I don’t really drink much juice usually but it’ll taste good with some alcohol in it.

“The weather really is nice today, right?”(aya)

“Yeah. Even though its winter, it’s pretty warm today.”

“And, everyone seems to be having so much fun as well.”

She spoke that while looking at the smiles of the various people passing by us.

When I ended up laughing hearing her say something I myself had been thinking, she looked up towards me confused.

“Nah, I was just thinking the same thing that’s all.”(renji)

“Oh really?”

“Yeah, that everyone is so full of smiles and we are the ones who protected it.”

“—Yes.”

So many humans had died. Even demihumans and beastmen as well.

And we killed a lot of monsters and demons as well. And in the end,—I even killed a God.

And the peace we earned was a place where so many were laughing like this. They live a life with smiles on their faces.

As we continued to look at that scene silently, a different sweet smell, other than the food we had, came to me. Glancing beside me, Aya’s face was right next to me.

Realizing my gaze, she looked away.....but she didn’t move away and stayed where she was, close to me. The slight reddening of her cheeks and ears must be imagination, I’m sure.



“Are you feeling cold?”(renji)

“Eh?”

“Your face is all red.”

“.....Mou, even if you realize that, please act like you didn't!”

“Hahaha.”

Ahh, I'm sure. This is what it means to be happy.

It felt warm inside my chest and I felt so calm. I heard the laughing voices of men and women and the energetic voices of the merchants trying to sell their stuff. Under the warm sun, a slightly cold air blew.

And in this relaxed and comfortable time, we ate our lunch. Just this alone, was able to make a person feel happy. It can make one laugh.

“Ah.”

And inside this happy time, I saw another familiar face.

With honey coloured hair shining from the sunlight, her usual smiling expression was currently one of surprise.

Oh? Did something happen to make her feel surprised? I tilted my head in

confusion but I couldn't think of anything. And behind her Feirona and Mururu were the same, Solnea was as usual though.

"What happened, Renji-san?"(aya)

"No, Ms Francesca and others are looking towards us."(renji)

When I said that, Aya who saw them just now, jumped up from the bench suddenly.

By the time I even thought of that, Aya had already walked fast towards Ms Francesca. She didn't run probably because she was wearing heels. I can't tell properly from behind but she seemed to be red to the ears.

Was it that embarrassing for her to be seen with me? That kind of hurts. I was thinking of that when Feirona and Solnea walked towards me. Ms Francesca and Mururu were talking to Aya there. I can't tell what they were talking about but, oh well, they look like they're having fun. Can't be sure about Mururu but Ms Francesca was making a wide smile.

"So you were here, eh?"(elf)

"yeah. After the match ended, I got hungry."(renji)

"Fu, you must been pretty nervous, eh?"

"Exactly. Where's Ermenhilde?"

“With Francesca.”

As I asked that while giving a shrug, he answered me quickly.

Well, they seem to be get along quite well. As they’re both girls.

If there was a problem, it’d be this black haired girl standing beside Feirona who was looking at me silently.

“What about you Solnea?”(renji)

“What, Renji?”

“You won’t talk with the other girls?”

“.....Should I have?”

Why are you asking me that?

When I looked back at Feirona while smiling wryly, he just gave a shrug. Looks like she’s been like that as usual all the time.

“If you’re not interested then it’s fine.”(renji)

“I understand.”(sol)

How straightforward, should I say? I was unable to reply any more to Solnea's unique personality. It seems it was the same for Feirona as he didn't even pay this much mind.

"It suits you quite well."(elf)

"Huh?"

"That armour."

"Thanks for the compliment."

Finishing eating the lizard meat, I gulped down all of the juice in a single breath.

"You did well today."(sol)

"Uhn?"

In a rare moment, as Solnea talked first to me, I asked that back again in surprise.

Feirona must have found it unusual as well as his normal calm expression showed some surprise.

"No, I was just thinking that as I thought, you are very strong, that's all."(sol)

“Oh please. There are literally a shit ton of people who are more stronger than me. In fact one’s right in front of me.”

Saying that I looked towards Feirona but he just gave a laugh and didn’t say anything.

“Is that so?”(sol)

“Yes, it is.”(renji)

Now then.

Putting the stick/skewer inside the empty cup, I stood up.

“What are you going to do next?”(renji)

“What about you?”(elf)

“I, have to go give some company to the King. And at night, there’s a ball inviting all the participants so I’ll be free only tomorrow.”

And tomorrow, I’ll probably sleep like a dead man.

And I also have to go meet Astraera.

“I see. Then we’ll talk then.”(elf)

“Yeah, sure.”

That talk, is for what we’ll do next.

We came to the capital on Mururu’s request but originally, Feirona is an elf, resident of the Forest of magical energy. Aya and Miss Francesca are students and Mururu lives in Elfreim.

I’m not sure what to do of Solnea but I——will probably leave on a journey again. It’s my intuition telling me as if it was almost a fact.

Koutarou even said that he’d be waiting at the Elfreim continent. After meeting Astraera, I’m sure she’ll have me go to the Elfreim continent,. I’m sure. I should be able to go along the way with Mururu but as expected, I can’t ask of others to travel to another continent with me now, an I?

Thinking of that, I realized that my journey with these comrades might be coming to an end as well.

“What’s happened?”(sol)

As if she could sense my thoughts, Solnea asked that.

As expected, even in those words, I could not sense anything like emotion inside it. She must have simply become curious of me who had gone silent.

“It’s nothing.”(renji)

I wonder what he was thinking as Feirona gave a wry smile as he looked at me.

## Chapter 57: God

It was, a completely empty place.

As far as the eye could see, in all 360 degrees, both up and down; it was all pure white. Not a tinge of any other colour existed here and that is why 'She' was the one who lived here.

Praying to the Goddess' statue, that prayer would then reach her, and only after gaining her permission, one could enter this place.

It was tranquil and pure.

A sacred land where only a chosen few were allowed to enter.

It was that kind of a place.

"You're finally here, eh?"

While in this place, even though she's supposed to not be not visible, or rather just made of light, or should I say looks like a distortion.....anyway, even though she's not supposed to have a physical body, she was currently, for some reason, sitting on a throne right in front of me completely visible.

Inside this white world, she was there with silver hair, elegantly wearing a white dress with silver embroidery, and the white skin that peeked out of her



dress could charm anyone. Even the throne was made of silver, and the cushions on it were made of a white material. Even though everything was so related to white, only her golden eyes, which was a different colour, stood out.

Her almost cold looking, calm eyes stared at me and her mouth was straight as a line.

Clearly, she was displeased.

Her smiling expression shown in her silver statue felt like it was nothing more than a rare expression from her. But still to think of her as beautiful even now, I guess as expected of a Goddess eh?

Goddess Astraera. The creator of humankind and the Goddess of light.

The one who summoned us to this world and asked us to kill the Demon God.

And she, while looking more like a Queen, sat on her throne, with her legs crossed, looking down towards me.

“Why, Astraera-sama, you seem to be well——”(renji)

“No need for empty flattery. Raise your head.”

Floor——well, since everything was white, it didn't really feel like a floor but still, I tried to greet her normally while giving a customary kneel when she cut me off instantly. I knew she was not in a good mood but she actually seems pretty damn pissed right now.

Probably because I didn't come to see her not a single time in the past one year.

As I raised my while thinking of a way to apologise to her, she continued to stare at me coldly. Because she had incredibly sharp features, she looked really scary. Almost as scary as an angry Utano-san, if I had to compare.

"Took you a while to come here, eh?"(ast) (T/N: 'Ast' for Astraera.)

But in her next words, I also felt some warm feelings of 'thanking for the troubles', or something like that.

She uncrossed her legs, as I heard some rustling of her clothes. And inside the tranquil space, I felt a more gentle atmosphere seep in.

"This past one year, how were you?"(ast)

".....Just as always."

"I see."

When I said that, it seems she understood what I meant as her way of speaking was very gentle. As I stood up and faced her directly, now her eyes were narrow with gentleness instead.

So she was just bluffing.....that's really bad for my heart.

Feeling with my own body that her pressure had reduced, I felt relieved. It looks like in this one year, she's grown even more human like as well.

While wondering whether I should be happy about that, I gave a deep sigh without letting her realize.

"How rude, the first thing you do after meeting me in such a long time is give a sigh?"(ast)

"It's probably because you have become more human-like though."

"Really? I don't really understand though."

She sure can talk.

While thinking about how serious she was, I gave another sigh. At that, her, almost cold, beautiful face gave a smile.

Her expression was, really similar to Eru's. Well I guess it's only obvious. After all, Eru was born by dividing out a part of Astraera's own magical energy. It's normal for Eru to be similar to Astraera in many ways.

Though their appearances are similar, their personalities are completely opposite. They're more, if I had to say, like mother and her daughter.

Astraera, Eru and Ermenhilde. If I had to speak of their relationship, that's the best way to describe it.

“The fact that you’re finally here means, I am allowed to presume that you’re finally ready to look forward again right?”(ast)

“Do as you please. But, its only because the world seems to be in danger again.”

“I see. Then, you will save the world once more, right?”

“If, the world really is in mortal danger that is.”

After a short pause.

“As long as my opponent is not another God.”(renji)

“I see.”

AS I said that while shrugging, she said that while sighing in relief. Looks like she really thought that I’d refuse.

She really still has a lot to learn.

I will, no matter what she says next, no matter what she wishes of me.....if it is to save this world from danger, I will not refuse. That alone, I can say with pride.

“So?”(renji)

But, I will not face another God.

It's the same even for this Goddess. Even though she once said that she hates fighting but after having faced the Demon God, I can tell. This Goddess is in a completely different dimension of power.

I can't even think that I could kill her easily even if I fought seriously.

——To kill Gods, a sacrifice is needed. A lot of precious people need to be sacrificed for such a thing.

“Renji, are you aware of the abnormality widespread in this world right now?”(ast)

“The fact that the Demon God's descendants are appearing in Imnesia, and that the monsters have begun to move more actively, is it?”

“Exactly. The more serious one is the former—the fact that those descendants are still being born.”

Fumu.

So, as expected, they weren't a random natural occurrence, but are truly the descendants of the Demon God. I was pretty sure already but being told that surely makes it easier to accept.

I recalled that black orc, and the black ogre that attacked the Magic city.

The skeleton I fought in the forest was— —I wonder about that one.

There was one thing common between the black orc and the ogre. That was that they were both too weak for the Demon God's descendants. No matter how specialised Ermenhilde is to kill gods, the descendants aren't weak enough that they can be taken down by me alone. In contrast, the Skeleton was strong enough that even me along with Mururu couldn't beat it at all.

Those two were newborn, but the latter one was there from a long time. That was the only way to possibly make it coherent. We had simply failed to find and kill that Skeleton during our journey to subjugate the Demon God. The Orc and the ogre were newborn and had not yet grown mature. That's why they lacked experience, and— —were weak.

Considering that we didn't go near the forest back then indeed, it all makes sense.

"One, question."(renji)

"Go ahead."

"I definitely killed the Demon God Nayfell, with these two hands."

"Yes, you did."

"Then why are new descendants being born still? Wasn't it the Demon God himself who gave birth to them?"

“It’s because Nayfell’s corpse still exists.”

“.....”

Those few words, made me choke. As if my heart had been grabbed, it felt tight and painful inside.

“.....corpse?”

“Yes. You should have received something from Zwenelia correct?”

Being told that, I recalled——the Demon Go’s heart. Beautiful like a crystal but much harder than that——ominous, abominable, detestable fragment of his heart.

It’s what the Spirit God Zwenelia sent to us through Mururu.

“That fragment of his heart?”

“Does it look like his heart to you?”

Her words seemed to imply as if our perception of it was not correct.

No, it’s not impossible. All we think we know about the Gods is nothing more than what we theorized and nothing more. Maybe our perception is flawed. And because of that we accepted that without a doubt.

Games, movies, mangas and novels. A lot of things existed in our world. In such things a lot of diverse 'info' about such beings of other world, like monsters, Gods, beastmen, demihumans, and fairies exist in mass quantity. And some of it did seem applicable in this world as well.

Like monsters and beasts in forest being afraid of fire, water monsters being weak to lightning. Water beast fire, lightning beats water, earth beats lightning, and winds beats earth. The basic knowledge and concepts about elements etc did indeed become one of our weapons in this world.

Though as this wasn't a game there were different set of problems but still —the knowledge we held was used by us with confidence.

That's why even against the Demon God.....by smashing the [heart] that lay in the centre of his body that surely seemed like just his weakness, I destroyed all of his body till nothing remained. I thought that it was enough but.....it seems like that [heart] was its actual true body.

"Meaning?"(renji)

"Since you broke its main body, the number of parts it broke into turned into descendants in turn."

The moment I heard that, my shoulders felt unbearably heavy. My head hurt like crazy and I used my fingers to press on the temple of head.

Does that mean, I am the cause of this?



“But, the problem doesn’t lie there.”(ast)

“Hm?”

“Felt a bit relieved?”

“.....thanks for the kind words.”

“Oh, you’re way of speaking has turned back to normal.”

“Thank you very much.” (T/N: Renji speaks formally with her but in the previous line he speaks like would normally so he fixes it here.)

When I spoke it that way again, she gave a laugh.

Even though the world is in danger, she’s calm as usual. Seeing her, I gave a sigh again.

“So, do I have to go around killing the descendants now?”(renji)

“That would be great on its own but, I doubt you’d make it in time.”

“What do you mean?”

I felt an ill omen when she said that.

If the newborn descendants are the threat to the world, why does she say that I won't make it in time? Exactly [what] will I be late for?

Waiting for her answer, I stayed quiet.

"The danger to the world is that the Demons are trying to revive Nayfell."

"Revive...."

Repeating what she said like parrot, I searched through my memories thinking of something similar I had heard before.

I found it soon enough. Back when I faced that demon at magic city, this is what that demon had said. That the Demon Lord Shelfa was refusing to revive the Demon God.

Thinking of that, it seems a portion of demons, whether it be the majority or the minority, are in favour of this and the Demon Lord isn't interested in it.

I can't imagine what that battle maniac is thinking at all but I don't really need to either. I won't know till I ask it directly myself.

"But the result will be——Renji, you should know it well as you made a similar wish."(ast)

".....aah."

When I wished to revive Eru, Ermenhilde was born.....it seems Nayfell will also be revived as a completely different existence.

That must be what Astraera means.

Now what kind of a God this [completely different existence] is—is that not the problem?

“Even I do not know what kind of existence it is.”(ast)

“What do you mean?”

“That is, whether it will hold the will of Nayfell—one of the 3 pillars of this world or will it be nothing more than an avatar of destruction.....or is it just a mere vessel.”

“And you don’t know that.”

“There have been countless times when Gods have revived beings of their own creation, for *eg.* humans or demihumans, but for an existence that isn’t even a descendant to revive a God, this is the first case after all.”

I guess, it is.

Even though Eru was born of the Goddess’ own magical energy, even the Goddess herself was unable to revive her properly.

Then what would happen if mere Demons tried to revive their Demon God, I can't even imagine.

Even though the world was in danger, I felt a bit of déjà vu,—probably because I did something similar.

I got to meet my partner Ermenhilde but I'm sure Nayfell—will become something different as well. It was a sad thing and painful.....once more, so many will get sacrificed.

That Demon God, no amount of hate is enough for that thing. If it revived as he was before.....I will again, fight with all my strength. Even while knowing how many sacrifices may arise to do that.

He said he was bored.

Just like Astraera wishes to look over the people who live in this world, just like Zwenelia like to sleep in peace and quiet,.....that monster, wished for strife and conflict.

Whether his will remains, or just his strength, or maybe he would be just a vessel. But—I will not ignore a God who wishes for strife.

“So, you said that I won't make it time?”(renji)

“The number of fragments into which the main body of Nayfell has been smashed into is simply too big. I'm sure that by the time they revive him, you will not be able to kill all the descendants in time.”

Is the number that big?

I felt like asking how many, but decided not to in the end. I feel like I'll only lose my motivation hearing some insane number.

If it was impossible for me alone, Souichi and the others can also help.....I thought but, if Astraera said that, the number should be so big that we won't make it in time even then.

"Then, what should I do? If you're going to tell me to kill a revived Nayfell again, I....."

I alone, am not sufficient.....in terms of power, and life.....in everything.

——the seven constraints set on Ermenhilde. Now that I know all of them, I know I cannot fight against a God all alone.

[My will to fight.]

[My will to protect someone.]

[To keep a promise to my comrades.]

[Fighting against the Demon God or his descendants.]

[Receiving Astraera's protection.]

[Death of a comrade.]

.....and the seventh one.

I cannot fight alone. If I don't have comrades— —if I don't have a lot of comrades, I cannot release my full strength. And above all—I need to make a huge amount of sacrifices as well.

I am not strong enough, to once again fulfil all those conditions.

I'm sure, that if all 7 of the covenants were released, I can fight one on one with Nayfell. No, I know I can win. Because my and Eru's.....Ermenhilde's power specialise in killing Gods.

But— —

"That's not it."(ast)

As if she could read my mind, Astraera spoke up with a smile.

"I, after the influence of monsters had reduced a bit more, was planning to prepare a replacement in place of nayfell."(ast)

"A replacement for Nayfell?"

"Right now the world, due to Nayfell's influence as well, is tilted towards the

monsters' advantage. So, I was thinking of increasing the influence of the humans (Goddess) and the demihumans and beastmen (Spirit God) to restore the balance in the world."

This is the first time I'm hearing of something like this.

But still, true, the world was currently overrun with monsters but there was no influence of humans or demihumans in Abenelm where the demons and Monsters live. That's because the monsters and demons continue to increase in Abenelm.

While the humans get killed and decrease due to monsters, Monsters themselves keep on getting born. That does destroy the balance. That's why, right now while the Demon God was not in existence, it was the best time to fix the balance between the 3 pillars.

"But, the demons are trying to revive Nayfell by themselves."(renji)

"Yes. If that happens, the demons will once more point their fangs towards humans and demihumans."

I don't even have to think to imagine what the result would be. War will start, once more.

Children and elders will have to take up weapons once more, and instead of working on fields peacefully, it'll turn the world into a kill or be killed world once again. That hell, will start again.

.....just thinking of it made me feel dizzy.

“And this time, the world, being already exhausted from fighting against the Demon God once, will not be able to survive.”(ast)

“You say that but you still sound pretty calm.....Or is it just my imagination?”(renji)

“No.”

When I asked that, she shook her head. Her silky silver hair swayed from her movements.

“Renji, I have only one wish to make of you.”

“Yeah.”

“A new Demon God—Lead a new demon God that hates fighting to the throne of Gods.”

But, the words she spoke were completely out of my expectations.

“.....What?”(renji)

“Did you not hear me? I am asking you to lead a new Demon God to the Abenelm continent.”

“No, I get that but.....”



I understand that its necessary and important but still...

I am one the Heroes who saved mankind and the Demon God is an enemy that mankind must defeat. He's the natural enemy of all living beings of this world. And she's asking me to arrange for a new Demon God.....I can already imagine how people will react to this.

Because I did not give her a reply, Astraera tilted her head in confusion as she looked at me. No even if you make such a cute gesture, I still can't easily nod my head to something like that you know?

“Do you perhaps need further explanation?”(ast)

“Please, yes.”

My voice was so flat that it surprised even me.

Looking at me like that and laughing slightly, she once again crossed her slender legs. If she wore glasses as well, she'd really look like a sexy teacher, I'm sure.

The reason I thought that was because Kudou did the same action as Astraera many times before while saying that. Really, both Kudou and Koutarou are nothing more than bad influences to everyone.

“This world has not yet recovered to survive another war. So, we need to put a Demon God on the throne who doesn't fight. If we can do that, even the

monsters will go silent.”(ast)

“.....Wait, why would monsters?”

“In fact, I should be the one to ask that of you.”

“What?”

“Why did you all not realize why the monsters have become more and more active after Nayfell died?”

From just those words, everything connected inside my head.

At the same time, a heavy, very heavy.....from the depths of my stomach, I leaked a sigh.

“Meaning?”(renji)

“Do I have to say everything out loud for you to understand? Or do you simply want me to say it?”

“——No.”

And , after coming into this space, for the first time.....Astraera, though only a small one, but she gave a laugh that I could clearly hear.

While looking at her, my heart only felt heavier.

Basically, now that a overpowering entity like the Demon God had disappeared, the monsters had begun to rampage and do whatever they felt like. They eat when they want, and go on rampages when they feel like it. And the one who was suppressing these natural instinct of monsters was the Demon God Nayfell. That means, the reason why the monsters were rampaging about right now was because I killed the Demon God. No, that also needed to be done but.....realizing that I'm the cause behind it, I really can't laugh.

.....in the end, what did that monster truly want to do?

I hate nayfell.

And I'm sure, he wished for someone like me as well.

He wanted to kill and destroy the world. Yet, because he existed, the monsters were kept in check as well.

In the end,——what lied at the end of his path? If I had lost and Nayfell had lived,.....what would have the world been like?

“Renji, when will you come back next?”

While I was feeling like scratching my head, a calm voice came to me.

It was as calm as the surface of a lake, it was Astraera's normal voice. When I heard the same voice I had heard the first time I met her, I felt a bit relieved.

But, what she spoke was completely different from that time, it was a personal thing instead.

“.....next time..”(renji)

“You won’t come again?”

“No, I will, I think.”

“I see.”

Maybe because she has a physical body right now, but being shown a smile like that made me extremely conscious about her.

Though, even if she had been nothing but light, or should I say, a distortion in space, I still would have listened to her anyway.

“Sometime soon.”(renji)

“I don’t like waiting. Please, come meet sooner next time.”

“Yes.”

While giving a vague reply, I lightly shook my head that felt a bit heavy.

“Renji.”

“Hm?”

“Since it was a rare festival, I was hoping you’d call me out in the city.”

“.....if you showed up in the city, it won’t be just a bustling festival anymore, you know?”

That’s what you care about?

When I gave a sigh while averting my gaze, I felt the pressure from her increase a bit.

“Even though I was waiting for so long.”(ast)

“.....I don’t care.”

Saying words that would be normally considered almost blasphemous, I gave a loud sigh.

“Though this body doesn’t require food, I still have a sense of taste you know?”(ast)

“I know.”

I had taken her to so many stalls before so of course, I know.

I'm sure that must have awakened the gourmet inside of her. Now leaving aside whether that was a good thing or not, why am I the only who is asked to do such things?

Even if its not me, tehre's Souichi and Kuuki—in fact, I'm sure Koutarou would immediately listen to anything Astraera asked. It must be because I was the first to have ever brought her out of this space, I guess.

“Freshly roasted meat is really tasty you know?”

Saying things that should be weird for a Goddess, she looked at me sulkily. Though Gods require that they are worshipped, this Goddess still loves festivals more than prayers and offerings.

I don't know who would want to watch a peerless beauty like her eating skewered Orc meat from a stall on some street. I definitely don't want to.

But still, this goddess really wants to eat it. I really can't understand what gods are thinking.

“The next time I come, I'll bring some for you, okay?”(renji)

“No, Renji, I want to eat a freshly roasted one.”

“.....is that so?”

Looks she really wants to get out of this space.

Well, I can understand her. Once you learn to enjoy such things, this empty space will always feel boring. I guess this also my responsibility as I was the one who brought her out of here.

“Even though back then, you’d always take me out.”(ast)

Even though she says ‘me’, she’s just one part of Goddess Astrara’s will.

“It was a youthful indiscretion on my part.” (renji)

“You still look pretty young from my point of view though?”(ast)

“Why, thank you.”

“Also, I find your normal way of talking is much more likeable than this.”

“.....Sure.”

After that, the conversation ended.

“So, where’s this Demon God I’m supposed to lead?”(renji)

“ .....

But, at that she made a really surprised face.

“Are you really asking me that?”(ast)

“What, did I ask something strange?”

“No. You really are sensitive to just hostility and nothing else, aren’t you?”

Wait, is she calling me dense?

Feeling slightly sullen, it must have shown on my face as Astraera gave a gentle smile.

“The descendant you people called as a tortoise. It’s the girl you found where you slaughtered that descendant.”

“Torotise?”

Tilting my head on a word that doesn’t exist in this world, I quickly recalled something.

Tortoise. Or rather the descendant Koutarou named [Genbu]. (T/N: Genbu refers to: Black Tortoise, a Chinese constellation symbol. Google for more info.)

It was giant like a mountain, and very slow. From above, it really did look like a tortoise.....it was once called the strongest descendant that lived ion Imnesia. Hearing that old name, I recalled the place where we killed it. Meaning.....

“.....So it’s Solnea, eh?”



When I said that name, the Goddess' smile deepened.

# Credits

Translator: [Shikkaku Translations](#)

Epub: [Estevam](#) / [dotNOVEL](#)

Epub Edition: [Trollo WN/LN EPUB](#)